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
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ANNE FURNESS.

A Novel.

Blackmore

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"VERONICA," &c.

Mrs. Frances Eleanor ^(Ternan) Trollope.



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
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ANNE FURNESS.

CHAPTER I.

I ALWAYS liked going to my grandfather's. His house had an atmosphere of stillness and mystery that was alluring to me. No doubt my childish imagination magnified and distorted many things there, as the eyes of an infant are not able to see objects as we see them with our adult vision. Neither mind nor eyes attain their just focus at once.

In my own home, where there were the constant movement and occupation incident to a country house situated on a large and well-stocked farm, the servants wondered greatly that "Miss Anne" should like going to Mortlands—Mortlands was the name of my grandfather's place; and I have more than once overheard them opining to each other that it was very bad for a child to be moped up in a house like that, without a young or cheerful face for her eyes to rest on from sunrise to sunset; and a queer lot that lived there, too, by all accounts! Such speeches only aroused a contemptuous resentment in me. Perhaps, too, they served to put Mortlands in a more alluring light than ever, by their vague hints of something strange about grandfather's household, which appealed to my inborn love of the marvelous.

My father also found it somewhat singular that his little girl should be so fond of staying at a dull place where there were no pets or play-fellows. But my mother never expressed any surprise on the subject. Mother and I had a silent sympathy on that, as on many another, point of feeling.

Mortlands was situated on the extreme edge of the suburb of a country town in the north of England, which I will call Horsingham. Between it and the nearest house, going townward, was a space we called the Park, which was simply a large meadow, bounded by a hedge, with ancient elms growing in it at intervals—trees that might have been the veritable "hedgerow elms with hillocks green" of L'Allegro. In the other direction there was no dwelling within two miles of Mortlands.

The house had once stood on a considerable estate belonging to it; but that was before my time, or grandfather's time either. When he first inhabited it, it had long been shorn of its territorial glories. The only land still attached

to it was a large, irregular, rambling garden inclosed within high stone walls.

This garden was my delight. I used to spend many long hours in it; sometimes with a story-book, curled up on a moss-grown old seat of rustic wood-work; sometimes wandering about the alleys, enacting imaginary scenes with imaginary companions. During these hours I was mostly alone, and this circumstance had a great charm for me. I was left absolutely to my own devices, and as I was a child of a very active and vivid fancy, my own devices amply sufficed to amuse me.

I have thought sometimes that to explore the long-silent haunts of memory is like prying into one of the Etruscan tombs they tell of, whose walls were once covered with bright pictures of the busy life which that solemn, rock-hewn chamber shut out forever.

There are the familiar implements of household use—the spent lamp, the earthen pitcher, the moulded vase. There, too, is found the tarnished ornament of Beauty, or the diadem of Command. There, from the fitfully faded paintings on the wall, start out the most familiar scenes in strange distinctness; while, not a yard apart, some great event—a king sitting in judgment, a battle with chariots and horses, or a nuptial ceremony—is barely decipherable.

The pomps and vanities, the grave alliances, the cruel combats—nay, even the solemn symbols of worship, perish and disappear. Besides, kings, heroes, gods—all are fading. We take our little taper, and step awe-stricken into the long-unbroken darkness, and peer and gaze—Who was this? What was that? Here sits a royal figure on his throne, whose courtiers have fallen away from him. Yonder are two pledging their troth before the priest, and the clasp of their outstretched hands is interrupted by a crumbling gap, across which a bloated spider runs swiftly. But lo! as we shift the dimly burning light, some coarse, common scene starts into life, and we see the butcher's shambles, or the slave grinding corn, as vividly as the day they were painted!

Thus, out of the hazy past, certain days and certain things reveal themselves with capricious distinctness to my memory. For example, I was accustomed to be at Mortlands in all seasons of the year; yet the place is indissolubly

associated in my mind with a soft, gray, autumnal sky, the smell of fallen leaves, and the faint chime of church bells wafted from a distance through the moist air.

My grandfather was called Dr. Hewson; my mother was his only surviving child out of a numerous family; and his wife had been dead many years before I was born. He was considered a very skillful physician, and had a large practice in Horsingham. He had the reputation of being very eccentric; and the household at Mortlands was considered "odd" and "out of the way."

The accusation of eccentricity was chiefly founded, I believe, on grandfather's withdrawal from society. He lived a very retired life. Except in his quality of doctor, the Horsingham world knew almost nothing of him. Now, when a man plainly evinces a distaste for our company, it is a strong presumption of some twist in his mind, or even, it may be, of some cloud on his conscience, since it is evident to us all that our company must be agreeable to sane and respectable persons. Thus reasoned Horsingham, at all events.

To the second count—that of "oddness" in his household—I believe grandfather would have had to plead guilty. The inmates of his house consisted, besides himself, of two female servants, and a person whom he always addressed as "Judith," but who was known to the rest of the world as Mrs. Abram. She was the widow of a long-deceased younger brother of my grandfather; and her proper style and title was, therefore, Mrs. Abram Hewson. But no one ever called her so. She was utterly dependent on grandfather. Her husband had ill-treated her during his life, and—having wasted her little fortune—left her destitute at his death. Grandfather gave her a home in his house. It was an act of disinterested benevolence, for Mrs. Abram could not be called an agreeable inmate. She was subject to fits of gloomy depression on account of her religious views; and I believe that she had at one time been so terrified by a zealous preacher that her mind became disordered. I remember, as a child, hearing from some of the servants at home that Mrs. Abram had been "in an asylum." And although the phrase conveyed no very definite idea to my mind at the time, it served to invest her with a weird interest.

She was of so singular an aspect as made it difficult to guess at her age. Her face was of a dull brick-red color all over. Her skin was singularly coarse. Once, when I was little, some one showed me the palm of my own hand through a microscope, and I have ever since associated Mrs. Abram's complexion with that scientific experiment.

She had a high Roman nose with a hump on the bridge of it, a high narrow forehead, very scanty eyebrows and eyelashes, and brown eyes, with queer yellow specks in them, which always reminded me of the coat of a tortoise-shell cat.

Her hair had been cut short, she said, and was entirely concealed by a black net cap lined with brown silk, save two loops on the temples—flat festoons of hay-colored hair, whereof no man saw either the beginning or the end. She always was dressed in black, and I never saw any point of brightness about her person, but the casual glitter of her worn wedding ring.

Perhaps the strangest peculiarity about Mrs. Abram was her voice. It was a muffled, inward voice, whose tone I vaguely connected in my mind with the lump on the bridge of her nose. When she spoke she dropped her lower jaw and kept her mouth half open, moving the lips very little, so that her articulation was indistinct. Also, one effect which her conversation had on my nervous system was an overpowering desire to make her clear her throat, and in default of daring to suggest such an operation to her, I was driven to clear my own, convulsively.

Poor Mrs. Abram! She was always very kind to me, and I believe she was sincerely grateful and attached to grandfather, and had a high respect for him; but that did not prevent her from being very despondent about his spiritual condition.

Then there was Keturah, grandfather's cook, housekeeper, and factotum. She was a woman of remarkably low stature, with a large dwarfish head, and short arms like the flappers of a seal. Her face was very pale, almost livid, with bright dark eyes, deeply sunken, and strong black eyebrows, and black hair. Her features, though disproportionately massive for her height, were not ugly. And when she smiled her face became transfigured into something that, if it were not beauty, affected me with a charm like that of beauty. But then Keturah very rarely smiled.

The other servant, Eliza, was a staid young woman, who belonged to an obscure sect of dissenters, and employed her leisure in reading tracts and hymns. But, unlike Mrs. Abram, she was very cheerful and equable in a mild, soft way. She had pale reddish hair, and a freckled face, and was slightly deaf. My interest in her was strongly aroused by being told that she had been cruelly treated by a stepmother, and that her deafness was the consequence of neglect and ill-usage in childhood.

Such was the household at Mortlands; for Havilah, the man who groomed grandfather's horse, and did whatever was done in the way of cultivating the garden, did not live in the house.

No doubt they were a singular set of people; and no doubt it was not unreasonable that my father's servants should wonder what amusement Miss Anne derived from staying among them.

I loved my grandfather dearly; but that did not altogether explain my delight in Mortlands; for I also loved my parents—especially my mother—very thoroughly, and I was treated at home with the fondest indulgence.

I believe the truth to be that Mortlands afforded a freer scope than Water-Eardley (my father's house) for the exercise of a faculty that is active in most children, and was peculiarly so in me—I mean imagination.

For example, the garden at home was trim, bright, and well cultivated, yet I cared nothing for it in comparison with Mortlands. I knew the former by heart; its red, yellow, or blue beds disposed in geometrical patterns, its clipped box borders, and smooth gravel paths. Nothing was left to the imagination. There were no nooks and hiding-places, no moss-grown walks, no mouldering walls and pleached bowers, no tangled thickets of heterogeneous growth to be peopled by childish fancies. At Mortlands the very air was thick with dreams. They swam in the moted sunbeam, and fluttered about the ivy, and brooded under the soft shadow of the sycamore.

My own home was a comfortable, modern country house. My father was a "gentleman farmer." His was chiefly grazing land, and he prided himself on his breed of cattle. He was fond of horses, too, and he always had a couple of hunters in his stable. Some of his friends considered this an unwarranted extravagance, and were kind enough to suggest (*to each other*, which was scarcely quite practical, but much safer than suggesting it to my father) that the money spent on the hunters had been better employed in buying a neat little carriage for Mrs. Bell—say one of those new park phaetons—and keeping a pair of ponies for her to drive. But I believe mother, gently as she was, would have flamed out very angrily at any one who should have said such a thing to her.

My father and mother made a love-match. But it was also a quite "proper" match in the eyes of the world. In station and fortune they were quite suited to each other. He had inherited a flourishing and unencumbered little estate; she was the daughter of a country doctor, and brought her husband a good dowry. She very much desired, I have learned from my grandfather, to bestow her little fortune, as she bestowed her hand, on her bridegroom unconditionally. But grandfather would not hear of this; neither would my father. Her money was settled on herself, and the arrangements of her marriage were utterly devoid of the least spice of romance.

Nevertheless, it was, as I have said, a love-match. They must have been a very handsome couple. I have heard people say that when they paid and received their bridal visits, George Furness and his wife looked for all the world like a prince and princess in a fairy picture-book.

They had passed out of the picture-book stage by the time I can first remember them distinctly. Father rode nearly a stone heavier than in his fairy-prince days, and mother's cheek had less rose-bloom on it; but they were still most delightful to look upon. Indeed, I think that my mother must have been more really beauti-

ful than at the time of her marriage; but perhaps most people would not agree with me.

Grandfather Hewson had handsome, boldly cut features—a little stern, perhaps—and mother's face was a softened copy of his. It was to his as a cameo is to a marble bust. She had beautiful dark eyes, and penciled eyebrows, and a quantity of bright chestnut hair that fell in tendrilly ringlets on her neck.

When I was a little child mother and father saw a good deal of company, and visited much among their country neighbors. I was an only child. Two boys had been born after my birth, but they both died when infants. Thus, when my parents were absent, I had no society at home save that of the servants, and to their society I had an intense repugnance.

I was a dainty child ("more nice than wise," as my nurse-maid contemptuously expressed it), and I shrank from our coarse, country-bred servants. Their boisterous movements, loud voices, and rough hands were disagreeable to me. The mingling of shyness and pride with which I regarded the inmates of our kitchen would, had I had no refuge from their company, have grown into positive hatred. But this tendency to a morbid tone of mind was greatly counteracted by my visits to Mortlands. At home the servants alternately scolded and spoiled me. They were, I believe, amused with my little disdainful airs, as they might have been amused at the shrinking of some delicate little animal from their rough but not unkindly touch. I had not the resource of solitude at will (which would have been far less injurious to a character like mine), for it would not have been safe to let a child of my years wander alone about the farm. There were perils by flood and field—the river, in which it was possible for me to drown myself, and the meadows full of cattle, into which it was not always safe to venture. Then, too, our house fronted the great high-road, and was separated from it only by a narrow sweep of gravel and a hedge. This dusty highway wound along, over hill and dale, from Horsingham all the way to London, and at certain seasons of the year it was thronged with a miscellaneous crowd, including tramps, gipsies, and generally disreputable characters, in whose too close neighborhood my parents would have trembled to trust their little girl. My nurse-maid, therefore, had orders never to let me out of her sight when father and mother were away from home.

Horsingham possesses a fine race-course, and was, and is, renowned for a great annual race, to which people flock from all parts of England. There is a spring meeting, too, but the great race is in the autumn. I remember Horsingham before there was a railway station there, and I consequently also remember seeing from my nursery window, which looked on to the road, the smart mail-coaches, laden with passengers, that dashed, with their four horses, toward the town at a certain hour every day. And then at "race time" the number and variety of vehicles that passed were endless. Water-Eardley was

situated about five miles from Horsingham, and four from the race-course, which lay between us and the town. Mortlands was nearly opposite to the race-course. Only from grandfather's house all signs and symptoms of "The Great Autumn Meeting" were jealously excluded. Grandfather hated the very name of horse-racing, and all connected with it; and the earliest occasion when I remember, as a child, to have heard sharp words pass between him and my father was during a discussion on that subject.

However, Dr. Hewson and his son-in-law were very good friends in general, and father was never unwilling to allow me to go to Mortlands, although he might be puzzled by the oddity of my taste in wishing to do so. He had great faith in grandfather's medical skill, and believed that my health (which was rather delicate when I was a little child) was benefited by Dr. Hewson's supervision. I doubt not he was right in so believing; but I am sure that the health of my mind benefited even more than that of my body by being subject to grandfather's influence. But I do not suppose it ever occurred to father to conceive that my mental condition needed any more subtle treatment than unlimited indulgence, so long as I did not make myself actively troublesome, and an occasional whipping (performed in a rather perfunctory manner) when I became a nuisance to my elders.

In endeavoring to describe the course of my uneventful childhood I shall present as faithfully as I can those things which are most strongly impressed on my memory, without much regard to the relative importance I should now attach to them. To revert to my former simile, I shall take at random those pictures which remain the most vivid in certain long-locked chambers of my brain.

For, although I be not skilled to analyze them, I doubt not that the causes which keep some memories fresh, while others fade and perish, are interwoven with the whole fabric of my nature.

CHAPTER II.

I HAD passed my seventh birthday at home. Mother had asked some children to spend the evening with me, and we had had cake and fruit and blind-man's-buff and magic-lantern. All this I know, because it is so set down in the chronicles of the family; but real remembrance of these festivities I have none—or a very slight one.

I remember the morning better; when I awoke to find a bright red doll's house, with green balconies, and a story-book by my bedside. The doll's house was from father; the story-book was mother's gift. I can see the book now, guiltless of illuminated borders or chromo-lithographs, but a treasure to me beyond all price. I could read it fluently. Mo-

ther had taught me to read when I was little more than a baby, by throwing bone counters on the floor for me to scramble for, on one side of which counters were two black, portly letters of the alphabet (a capital and a small letter), and on the other a colored picture of some bird, beast, or flower, whose name began with the same letter. This, too, is matter of faith with me, and not of knowledge; for although I distinctly remember the look of the bone counters—one especially, bearing the image of a prancing horse, with a coat of the color called by artists burnt sienna—that is because some remnants of this notable company of worthies lingered on in my nursery until I was at least nine or ten years old. I know not how they finally disappeared. Who *does* know how such things finally disappear?

At all events I was quite able to read my birthday book, and I so enjoyed reading it that I insisted on carrying it to grandfather's when I went to Mortlands on the day after it was given to me.

Father and mother were going to spend a week with an aunt of the former who lived in the country, some miles from us, and I was to stay at Mortlands during their absence. This prospect was the only thing that could have consoled me for mother's going away. But no prospect could make me part from her unmoved. Dear mother! how pretty and graceful she looked as she stood at the door to watch me depart! I can see her now, with her delicate muslin dress, and a crimson ribbon at her throat, and her bright curls falling lightly from a high comb that gathered them together at the back of her head. But my last glimpse of her, as the dog-cart whisked round the corner of the drive, was dimmed by tears.

"Don't ye take on, Miss Anne!" said Dodd, the groom, who was driving, and beside whom I was perched on some cushions.

I did not wish my tears to be observed, and I turned my head aside, as if to contemplate the landscape, while I took out my little pocket-handkerchief to wipe my eyes. This, however, was an operation I could not perform unobserved, for my handkerchief was attached by a loop to a ribbon round my waist, and I well remember the difficulties connected with the using of that square of cambric.

Selina, my nurse-maid, perceived that I was bending myself double, and was twisted all on one side; and, leaning over from the back seat where she sat, exclaimed, "What's she doing? Why, Anne! if she ain't crying! Well, I wouldn't be such a baby!"

The effect of which sympathizing speech was to make my tears flow the faster.

Dodd was gruff but good-natured, and, despite his rough exterior, had more delicate tact than buxom, bright-eyed Selina.

"Come," said Dodd, "I don't know what you may think of it, S'lina, but it seems to me as a young lady of seven—*turned* seven year old—ain't exactly a baby! That's a funny

idea, ain't it, Miss Anne? Turned seven—rising eight, as one may say! Lord, S'lina, I should have thought as you'd have knowed better than that!"

I glanced up at Dodd half distrustfully, but he kept his eyes steadily turned away, and flicked Ruby (father's fast-trotting mare) thoughtfully with his whip. This sagacious behavior had its due effect. I hastily wiped off the last tear with the extreme corner of my pocket-handkerchief, and prepared to comport myself with the self-command which the world evidently expected from a person of seven years old.

But Selina, with characteristic obtuseness, disturbed my returning composure.

"Ah!" said she; "the idea of crying when she's a-going to her grandfather's! Such a nice place to be at!"

I perfectly well knew that Selina by no means considered it a nice place. I detected (or fancied I detected) a tone of ridicule in her voice; and ridicule directed against the inmates of Mortlands always stung me sorely. I said nothing, but I felt my cheeks burn, and my childish heart beat fast.

I know not whether it were mere stupid love of teasing, or whether Selina really fancied I was deceived by her clumsy acting; but at all events she continued to speak of Mortlands in the same sneering tone.

"Oh my, Miss Anne, how pleasant it must be there, to be sure! You always enjoy yourself at Mortlands, don't you?"

"Yes," I answered, sharply; "I do enjoy myself there; but I sha'n't talk to you about it."

"Hoighty, toighty! Why not, pray?"

"Because you can't understand things. You're stupid, and I don't like you."

Selina burst into a fit of laughter, which irritated me the more because I felt it to be genuine.

"Now she's on the high ropes!" she exclaimed. "There never was such a faddy little monkey!"

"Leave her alone," said Dodd; "what's the good of bothering the child? It's nat'ral she should love them as loves her. Every body ain't so hard-hearted as *you* be."

Selina had the good-humor of utter insensibility. She was not in the least put out by this speech. It sank into my heart though, and from that day forth commenced a new feeling in me for Dodd. I was grateful to him with a gratitude which those alone can understand who, in childhood, have needed and received a refreshing word of timely sympathy. It fell on my angry spirit like dew on a parched soil.

I was silent for a while. But the brightness of the day, the exhilarating movement of the vehicle through the fresh air, and the still more exhilarating sense of kindness at hand, soon restored my cheerfulness.

During the remainder of the drive I ignored Selina as far as possible (I had by no means forgiven her), and chatted away with Dodd. I

had already read one or two of the stories in my new book, and I talked instructively, as I flattered myself, retailing much newly acquired information. One of the stories was laid in India; and I gave Dodd a glowing account of a country far away, where it was very, very hot always—far hotter than the hottest summer in England—but where there were strange animals and splendid plants, and where the people wore gold and diamonds on their clothes, and rode about on elephants.

To this Dodd replied that he didn't believe as he should think much of that country; give *him* horse-flesh! Which a little disappointed me.

When we arrived at the dear old garden gate at Mortlands, Selina got down to ring the bell, for Ruby did not like standing, and Dodd thought it unsafe to relinquish the reins.

Selina rang a peal at the rusty bell that made me quiver sympathetically as the clanging noise broke the peaceful stillness of the place, for I knew how it would jar against the calm that reigned there. At home I should not have cared had she made twice as much noise.

After a little pause the gate was opened, and Eliza appeared at it. She was no more flurried than if Selina's alarum had been the tinkling of a musical box. I reflected that, under certain circumstances, it was not wholly a misfortune to be somewhat deaf.

A little black trunk, containing some clothes for me, was lifted down and placed inside the gate. Selina gave me a sounding kiss on the cheeks, which I received with passive coldness, and mounted to her place again. Dodd touched his hat as I called out, "Good-by, Dodd; please tell mother that I am very well, and that I had a nice drive." And then Ruby, who had been fidgeting and chafing during the few minutes of her enforced stay, set off along the avenue of branching elms that bordered the road from Horsingham nearly all the way to Water-Eardley, at a pace that soon carried the dog-cart out of sight.

Eliza shut and locked the gate, and I stood in the garden, a little dizzy with my rapid drive.

From subsequent and repeated experience of similar days, I do not doubt that as soon as I had seen Mrs. Abram I was sent into the garden to amuse myself until the dinner hour, at which time grandfather would join Mrs. Abram and me. All the morning he was either seeing patients abroad (although he had voluntarily, and by degrees, already relinquished a great part of his practice), or was shut up in his study, where none of us would have dared to disturb him save on the very gravest emergency.

I say that, from subsequent experience, I do not doubt that I was welcomed by Mrs. Abram in her own mournful and husky manner, and was then sent out to amuse myself; but I do not remember that such was the fact.

The next picture that memory preserves of

that day shows me myself nestling on the rustic, moss-grown seat I have once before alluded to, with the new story-book in my hand, and a heap of flame-colored nasturtiums on my lap. How well I recall the hot, pungent taste of their seed-vessels that I loved to bite at, although they burned my mouth! I was reading a story whose heroine was called Helen; and I have ever since connected that name with the color of yellow—an association due, of course, to the nasturtiums.

Presently, as it draws near two o'clock—grandfather's dinner hour—Eliza comes to call me into the house, and takes me to the little bedroom I always occupy at Mortlands, there to wash my face and hands, and brush my hair. And while this operation is being performed she reveals to me that she has got leave to go out to tea some evening toward the end of the week, and to take me with her, if I am willing to go. This is great news. I am very willing to go, and begin to inquire about Eliza's friends with much interest.

"Are they nice people, Eliza?"

"Why, Miss Anne, they are humble, but godly. They have got religion, the whole family."

"Like Mrs. Abram?" I ask, doubtfully, for the phrase to my ears is not suggestive of festivity.

"Oh, Miss Anne, it is not for me to judge. They don't belong to the same Church, you know. They go to our chapel."

"Do they—do they have nice things when they ask people to tea, Eliza?"

The answer to this question was highly reassuring; it included hot butter-cakes and other dainties, so that I descended to dinner in very good spirits. I was not, in truth, a specially greedy child. But the only very "religious" person I knew at that time was Mrs. Abram; and her asceticism was such that I was prepared to find people renowned for piety indifferent to hot tea-cakes, if not absolutely disapproving of them. An enlarged experience has since entirely disabused my mind of that notion.

Grandfather was as kind and dear as ever, and even Mrs. Abram only gave a smothered sigh as she wished me many happy returns of my birthday. Grandfather gave me a beautiful toy dog, snowy white, with a red morocco collar round its neck, and standing on a green platform. Mrs. Abram presented me with a woolen jacket of her own knitting, and would have added a packet of penny books, but that grandfather peremptorily interposed to prevent her.

"Don't you think you shall be accountable for keeping the bread of life from her, Dr. Hewson?" remonstrated Mrs. Abram. She spoke so slowly and huskily, with such a far-off muffled tone (as of one discoursing inside an empty hogshead), that I was impelled to clear my throat with a shrill sound that was almost a scream.

"No doubt I shall be accountable for that, if

I am accountable for any of my actions, Judith. Come, come, eat your dinner."

Grandfather tapped sharply once or twice with his open palm on the table-cloth, and poor Mrs. Abram started from a melancholy drooping attitude she had assumed, and proceeded to obey him.

All through dinner-time he watched her closely, and, if he saw any symptoms of moodiness in her, proceeded to rouse her with a peremptory sharpness, which I did not then fully understand, but which I now know to have been dictated by kindness and wisdom.

I was radiant, and talked about my various birthday gifts with the genuine self-engrossment of a child. The toy dog's name was a matter for great debate and deliberation. When at length that was settled (I called it Jessie: I have totally forgotten for what reason) dinner was over, and I climbed on to grandfather's knee and petitioned to have a story told me. A story! That was my great delight. Any one who would tell me a story was sure of winning favor in my eyes.

Grandfather had a quantity of iron-gray hair tossed about in confusion over his head. Occasionally the whim would seize me to arrange this thick mane in what I considered a becoming manner, and I made loud lament that grandfather's hair *would* not "stay parted." It would no more "stay parted" than water will. And yet no lady's hair is softer and silkier than were those willful locks.

On this special day I claimed a sort of birthday privilege to combine the two enjoyments of combing grandfather's hair and listening to grandfather's story.

"What shall I tell thee, little Nancy?" asked grandfather, submitting with sweet patience to the ruthless operations of my seven-year-old fingers as they plunged into his hair.

"Oh, a story, please, grandfather: *any* story!"

"Once upon a time there was a man who was very poor, and got his living by cutting wood in a forest—"

"Oh, I know that one! That's the Forty Thieves!"

"Well, you didn't bargain for a *new* story, little Nancy!"

"No; but—please—*would*—you—because—yesterday—was—my—birthday?" said I, breathlessly, in one polysyllabic utterance.

"But I don't know any new stories."

"Then tell *about* something. Tell about savages."

"Oh, you little barbarian! I suppose you would like to hear about cannibals best?"

"Poor creatures!" murmured Mrs. Abram, shaking her head over her work. "How awful to think of the heathen!"

She raised her eyes as she spoke with such a strange look of terror that I clung closer to grandfather, under the influence of a nameless alarm. I was always very accessible to emotions of fear—a peculiar, formless fear, compounded of vague possibilities. In the presence

of physical pain, or tangible danger, I was not a coward.

Grandfather stroked my head softly, and made answer, "No, no, little Nancy; we will have nothing savage in our birthday story. We will speak of something pleasanter. I have a true story that I can tell you; a story about a boy."

"What boy?"

"An Anglo-Scottish boy."

"What for?"

My question was merely intended to demand, in a compendious manner, all the information that could be given me respecting the boy. But Mrs. Abram interpreted it literally, and replied, as through a blanket, "Will of God, love."

"There were, once upon a time, two boys," began grandfather.

"Two boys—?"

He held up a warning finger to prevent further interruptions; and I nestled my head down against his breast so that I might *feel* as well as hear the vibrations of his deep voice, and prepared to listen quietly.

"These two boys were at school together. One was six years the elder of the other, so that he was quite an old boy in comparison to the little fellow."

"May I just ask this: what were they called?"

Grandfather paused a moment, and then said, "The big boy was called Abel, and the other Stephen. Stephen was a bright-faced, affectionate boy—very bold and generous by nature. About Abel I can not say very much, except that he was not mean or cruel, and did not like to see the small boys put upon by the elders. Steenie—that was Stephen's nickname—was another boy's fag." Here I again interrupted to have the meaning of that word explained to me; which being done, grandfather resumed:

"Steenie's master was a very brutal boy. He liked to tease and hurt animals, and to inflict pain on any helpless thing that could not resist him. Nobody liked him, but many feared him; for he was tall and strong, and ready to fight always. One day poor little Steenie had offended this ruffianly boy; and after school-hours, when we were all in a big playground together, he set upon the little fellow, and began to beat him so cruelly that several of the boys cried shame!"

"Why didn't they save Steenie? I would have *killed* that bad boy! I would have got a gun and shot him!"

I clenched my little fists, and sat uprightly on grandfather's knee, with cheeks on fire with indignation. He looked at me curiously, but not angrily. Mrs. Abram, on the contrary, raised her hands in reprobation of my evil passions.

"We didn't shoot each other, little Nancy," said grandfather. "The masters would have objected to the practice, and it might, if carried to any length, have brought discredit on the

school. But Abel was very grieved and angry to see the poor little fellow so badly used; so he went up to the bully, whose name was Jackson, and told him either to leave off beating Steenie, or to fight him (Abel)."

"I hope he hurt Jackson ten times worse than Jackson hurt Steenie!"

"Well, he had all the will to do so, but Jackson happened to be twice as big and strong as Abel, and Abel got licked. But he had given Jackson enough for one while, and he never afterward was so cruel to little Steenie as he had been. And not long after the fight, Jackson left the school, and then Steenie became Abel's fag, and they grew very fond of one another."

"I should have loved Abel—oh, ever so! if I had been Steenie."

"Steenie was a very grateful-hearted little fellow, and he did love Abel 'ever so,' although what Abel had done for him was a small thing, after all. One day Steenie jumped into the river, with his clothes on, to save a little dog from being drowned, just because he knew Abel was fond of the creature."

"I like Steenie."

"Yes; most people did like Steenie."

"Did he die?"

"No; he grew up to be a man, and became a soldier, and went away to India."

"Oh, I know all about India!"

"Do you, indeed, little Nancy? That is rather valuable knowledge in these days."

"Yes; it's awfully hot there."

"True. Well, that is nearly as much as some government officials have known about India within—the last cycle or so. You open big eyes, and don't understand a word I'm saying, little Nancy. Well, Steenie went to India, and married a pretty young lady, whom he was very fond of, there; and they lived very happily until the young lady died."

"What became of Abel, grandfather?"

"Oh, you want to know what became of Abel? Why, he didn't turn soldier. He took to killing folk in another fashion."

"Why did he kill them?" said I, a good deal startled.

"For the same reason as the soldier—to earn his living."

"Is Steenie the—the—Anglo-Saxon boy you were going to tell me of, grandfather?"

"Anglo-Scottish, little Nancy. No; the boy I had chiefly to speak about is Steenie's son, Donald Ayrle."

"Oh! then it's ever so long ago the fight, and—why, grandfather, *your* name is Abel!"

"And *your* real name is Anne, if you come to that, little Nancy."

"No, but do tell me! Was it you that saved the boy and fought the other boy? But, grandfather, I'm sure you never killed any body? So you just told a story—there now!"

"You asked for a story, didn't you? But I must finish, because I want to go away, and there is an interesting part to come. Steenie's

son, Donald, was sent home from India when he was a very small child. India—which you know all about—does not do for little white boys and girls to live in. They wither up like flowers that get no shelter from the sun. So Donald Ayrle was sent to his mother's relations in England to be taken care of. But the relations are going to leave England; and Donald is now a good big boy at school. And his father wrote to me to ask if I would let him, for the sake of auld lang syne—”

“What's that?”

“I can not stay to explain it fully now. In short, Captain Ayrle asked if I would let his boy spend his holidays here, now and then; and if I would look after him sometimes. And he is coming very soon;—*there now!* as you say, little Nancy.”

Grandfather set me down on the floor, kissed me, and bade me be good and not tease Mrs. Abram. And then he went away to his study.

I would fain have asked a hundred questions about this Donald, and about grandfather's school life, and many other things. But I knew that it was vain to beg grandfather to stay when he had once said he must go. I never knew him go back from his word in the most trifling things.

So I was driven to calm my excitement as best I could; and being in want of something to do, I accepted Mrs. Abram's offer of teaching me to do a sample, and sat down with a box full of scraps of colored wool and a square of canvas, to mark my name on it. Mrs. Abram took advantage of grandfather's absence to read aloud from one of the little penny books she had by her. My head was so full of other matters that I did not attend very much to what she was reading. I have a dim notion that it was the life (after his reformation) of a penitent “navvy,” who had been a hideous reprobate, and who was quite sure that his own sins had been washed white as snow, but suffered a good deal from despondency about the sins of his neighbors.

But I was so engrossed with speculations as to what “Donald” would be like, that not only did he stand between me and the “navvy” (which perhaps was as well), but he absolutely obliterated the promised tea-drinking for a while. By-and-by Mrs. Abram went away to her own room. I think she usually took a nap after dinner, but I am not sure.

I was not sorry to be alone. There I sat before the red, glowing fire, dreaming delightfully. It was in the autumn. I am sure of the date by my birthday, which falls on the 17th of September, and this was the following day.

There is a fibre in my composition which always responds to the influence of a pensive melancholy. I suppose it is the same strain in my nature that, for as long as I can recollect, has made me prefer to spring and morning the evening of the day and the autumn of the year.

I have said that I was alone, but in fact there was another occupant of the room (I speak

not of visionary creatures of the fancy, for they were thick as motes in a sunbeam, and made a society that I loved better than that of most beings in the flesh), namely, Tib, my grandfather's tailless Manx cat, whom I looked on as a rare and valuable phenomenon in natural history. Tib crouched on the hearth-rug beside me, purring drowsily, and blinking his green eyes at the fire. Perhaps he, too, was dreaming. The twilight grew deeper. The air was so still that not a twig stirred of the garden shrubs outside the long French window, and all the house was hushed in silence, save only the chirp of crickets on the kitchen hearth. I could hear their elfin voices across the broad stone passage that divided it from the dining-room, and Tib's purring droned out a dreamy bass to the shrill cricket chorus.

Suddenly, but softly, Eliza opened the door and said to some unseen person, “Master is in his study. He can't be disturbed just now. Will you please stay here a bit until I can tell Dr. Hewson as you're come?”

The unseen person entered the room. Eliza left it and closed the door. I was much startled. The apparition of a stranger at Mortlands was an unprecedented phenomenon within my remembrance. I remained sitting on my little stool, with my scraps of wool and the square of canvas crumpled up on my lap, and it was a second or so before I ventured to raise my eyes. When at length I did so, they encountered nothing very terrible—merely a roundish head, dimly seen in the dusk, and by no means so high above my own as I had anticipated. My eyes fell again immediately, and lighted on a pair of clumsy high-lows, whereof the toe of one was uneasily hiding against the heel of the other.

CHAPTER III.

THE owner of the high-lows stood for half a minute without moving, further than to kick one foot against the other, as I have said. Then he advanced from the door toward the fire and sat down. But he took a chair that was out of the range of the fire-light, and was, besides, so far from the window as to receive no glimmer from thence, so that he was immediately swallowed up in a black gulf of shadow.

I observed Tib blink greenly toward the corner where he of the high-lows sat, and I envied Tib's power of vision, for I firmly believed that cats could see even in the most palpable darkness, and I took it for granted that the black shadow was to Tib transparent as a crystal screen.

I did not know what to do. I felt that I was not behaving with the ease and *à plomb* which, according to Dodd, might be expected from my years, and yet an invincible shyness bound me.

At length, after a silence which seemed to last an hour, I muttered, stammeringly, “Would you like to come nearer the fire, please?”

"Yes, I should," was the immediate response, delivered in a clear voice, and with an accent that was strange to my ears.

Encouraged by this prompt acquiescence, I ventured further:

"Would you like to have the other stool and sit in front of the fire?" As I spoke the stranger emerged from his obscurity, and I saw by the fitful light from the hearth—it was now almost dark outside—a little boy with light auburn hair and blue eyes, and a singularly grave and candid expression of face. When I observed his gloveless hands, red and purple with the cold, I did not wonder that he should be willing to approach the fire.

He drew up the stool I had pointed out beside mine, and sat down, stretching his legs out straight before him. They were not very long legs, and did not stretch far; but they were stout and sturdy, as was the boy's whole build.

"How cold you are, ain't you?" I said, emboldened by finding a person apparently still more silent and awkward than myself.

He nodded, and answered briefly, "Pretty well." Something in the look that accompanied the words—a half smile, a little frank lifting of the brows—made me all at once sure that this could be no other than "Steenie's" son.

"You're Donald, ain't you?" I said, forgetting to be shy in my eagerness, and looking straight at him with all my eyes.

"Yes; I'm Donald Ayrle."

He kept rubbing his hands, or clapping them together, and tapped with one thick boot against the floor, as though he were keeping time to a tune.

"I know about your father, and Abel, and the fight with Jackson. Grandfather told me. Grandfather was Abel. Did you know?"

"Who is your grandfather?" demanded Donald, looking at me very solemnly.

"Why, Dr. Hewson! He was very fond of Steenie. So am I. I like Steenie for saving the dog, don't you?"

It appeared on investigation that Donald was unacquainted with the story of the great fight between Hewson and Jackson, and the cause of that terrific combat. He merely knew in a general way that his father and my grandfather had been school-fellows. But he had not seen his father for a long time ("Not since I was quite a little fellow, several years ago," he observed, with gravity), and he was of opinion that when he left India he was too much of a baby to be talked to on such important topics.

"I'm seven years old," said I. "Turned seven!"

"Oh," answered Donald, "I was seven almost four years ago!"

While I was taxing my powers of calculation to ascertain the present age of this enviable person, who had been seven almost four years ago, he added, "I shall be eleven in two months."

We both sat silent for a time after this, looking into the fire. At length I resumed the conversation in the form of a catechism; which, in-

deed, was the form my conversation was apt to take.

"Did grandfather know that you were coming to-night?"

"I suppose not. The maid said I wasn't expected yet. Old Crowe said he should write in time, but I suppose he didn't."

"Who is old Crowe?"

"Our writing-master."

"Do you like him?"

"No; I should think not!" The answer was given in such a tone as made me feel that my question had involved an absurdity. Still I could not refrain asking, timidly, "Doesn't any body like him?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Donald, musingly. It was evidently a new idea to him that any body should be expected to like old Crowe.

"Don't his relations like him?"

"Perhaps they may. I shouldn't like him if he was my relation, that's all!"

I meditated on these words for some time, and at last resolved to pursue the matter further. I wished Donald to like me, and I thought that if he could be got to state his grounds of objection to old Crowe, I might obtain a criterion whereby to judge what was likely to win his (Donald's) approbation; so I put yet another question: "Why shouldn't you like him if he was your relation?"

"Old Crowe! Why he drops his h's! And he's so beastly greedy! Why he has turtle-soup every day at the pastry-cook's; and his wife and all of them have to eat scrag of mutton! I shouldn't think you'd like that yourself!" exclaimed Donald, in a tone of indignant remonstrance.

I hastened to assure him that I should *not* like that myself; and that I considered it very naughty and shocking to be greedy. I further reflected with secret satisfaction that I had been taught to pronounce my h's. But I did not mention this fact.

Presently I resumed my catechism.

"Who brought you here?"

"Nobody. I came by myself."

"Did—you—walk?" I demanded, hesitatingly.

"Walk!" echoed Donald. And the scorn in his voice made the hot blood suffuse my face until my very ears tingled. "Why, what a little silly you must be to suppose I could walk from one end of England to the other!"

"Oh! I didn't know."

"Did you never learn geography?"

I was forced, with unspeakable humiliation, to confess that I had not yet tackled that science. But I asserted (I fear quite groundlessly) that I was going to begin immediately.

"Well, I don't know much geography," was Donald's utterly unexpected reply. "We do Latin mostly. And a jolly lot of it too, I can tell you! You wouldn't be able to do a quarter of it."

I suggested that I thought I could learn Latin if I tried.

"Oh no, you couldn't," returned Donald, decisively. "Girls never learn Latin. Besides, you're too small. Hullo! What a queer-looking cat! Why, he hasn't got a tail! What a lark!"

Donald leaned across me to stroke Tib, who had arisen, and was stretching himself on the hearth-rug, thereby conspicuously exhibiting his lack of tail.

My self-consequence had been a good deal ruffled by Donald's cavalier speech about the Latin. The accusation of smallness, too, seemed to me injurious. I therefore seized on the present opportunity to retort; and answered, with dignity, "Why, he's a Manx cat. Manx is in the Isle of Man. And Manx cats never have tails. I wonder you didn't know that!"

"No! Haven't they, though? None of 'em got any tails? Are you sure? Have you ever been at Manx, in the Isle of Man?"

Donald was so simply good-humored, so willing to be as surprised as I would have had him, so far from resenting, or even perceiving, my little bit of a sneer, that I instantly put myself at the bar of conscience (to me, that has never been an indulgent tribunal. I have usually found my judgment of myself far sterner than the judgment of others upon me; but, alas, I believe, far juster also!), and became quite penitent. I hoisted up Tib in my arms, and set him on Donald's knees, as a peace-offering, advising him, at the same time, to stroke Tib, and feel how soft his coat was; and declaring that I dared to say Tib would make great friends with him very soon.

At this moment grandfather opened the door, and stood there for a second, looking at our two childish heads bending down close together in the shine of the fire.

Donald scrambled to his feet as soon as he became aware of grandfather's presence in the room, and the latter advanced and took the boy's hand kindly in his. His other hand he laid on Donald's head, and turned his face so as to see it as well as the gloom would allow.

"Hullo, Master Donald!" said grandfather, smiling with his mouth, but fixing grave, searching eyes on the blue eyes raised to meet his. "So you've stolen a march upon us! I did not expect you until Wednesday."

"I hope it ain't inconvenient, Sir," began Donald, blushing.

"Not a bit, boy; not a bit! Glad to see you. H'm! you're like your father. You couldn't be like a better man. Poor little Steenie! How the old times come back! But you're a giant to what he was when I first knew him. You're older, eh? Almost eleven? Aha! The years spin along 'swifter than a weaver's shuttle.' Men found *that* out in the ancientest days. *Good face!*"

Grandfather uttered the last words half aloud, in a fashion he had sometimes of soliloquizing audibly. And as he spoke them, he

relinquished his hold of Donald, and pushed him gently from him.

Then, as one who reads aloud closes a chapter with lowered voice, and begins a fresh one in a correspondingly fresh key, grandfather resumed in a quite different, and much louder tone, "Now, before I ask you a word about your journey, or any thing else, go up stairs and wash your hands and face, and brush your hair, for tea. You must be hungry. They're getting something ready for you. Here's Eliza. Show Master Ayrlic to his room, Eliza. Give him some soap and water. Eliza will look after you. She's a very good, kind young woman; a trifle deaf; so that if she don't answer you directly, you mustn't think her sulky. Be off!"

The instant Donald had disappeared I sprung upon grandfather's knee, and plunged into a recital of all that I had said to Donald, and all that Donald had said to me, which lasted until Mrs. Abram came in, simultaneously with the tea-tray.

I did not then notice it as any thing remarkable; but I observe retrospectively that Mrs. Abram was never intrusted with any household duties; that she was never expected to take any share in the domestic administration; and that she never seemed to wish to do so. She, indeed, demanded little personal attention; but she contributed nothing in the way of labor or arrangement to the government of the house. In this department Keturah held undivided sway.

I gathered a general notion from what grandfather and Mrs. Abram said to each other that Donald had come a long way by the coach, and that he was at a great public school in a southern county. I remember Mrs. Abram murmuring, in her huskiest tones, "Did the poor child come by himself all that way, Dr. Hewson?" and grandfather's replying, "By himself? Of course he did! He didn't require a nurse-maid to take care of him, Judith."

Then Donald came down, with his face shining very much, and his hair all sprinkled with drops of water. Cold meat and some beer were brought up for him, and Keturah sent in a dish of mashed potatoes deliciously crisped and brown on the top, and afterward several relays of hot tea-cakes, for which she was famous.

Donald ate and drank with true, healthy, school-boy appetite. Mrs. Abram was aghast at the quantity of food that disappeared within his unwearied young jaws. But grandfather looked on with glistening eyes. I had my little cup of tea—a pale brown liquid, more than three parts milk—and some of the nice hot cake. But I looked longingly at the mashed potatoes, and was only restrained from asking for some of them by the fear lest Donald should think me greedy, like old Crowe.

After tea grandfather took his usual place at the fireside; Mrs. Abram sat opposite to him, on a specially uncomfortable chair she had selected for her own use, and began to knit some-

thing made of fleecy wool. I climbed on grandfather's knee, and Donald was bidden to draw his chair up before the fire.

"Now, Donald Ayrle," said grandfather, "have you been duly presented and introduced to this young person? Miss Anne Furness, of Water-Eardly Manor, commonly called little Nancy—"

"Not commonly, grandfather," I whispered. "Only by you."

"Uncommonly called little Nancy," pursued grandfather; whereat I felt abashed.

"Have you made friends with each other, you two?"

"Yes, Sir," said Donald.

"That's right. I want you to be good friends. You are the only two young things in the house. All the rest of us are very, very ancient."

"Is Tib old, Sir?" asked Donald, simply.

"Tib is fallen into the sere and yellow leaf," replied grandfather.

"What is that, grandfather?" I asked.

"That is a way of saying that he is getting old; just as the leaves turn dry and yellow when they are near dropping from the tree."

"But the leaves grow again, don't they?"

"Ay, ay, little Nancy. The leaves grow again. But when poor Tib disappears from among us his place will know him no more. There will be other Tibs, perhaps; Tib's kittens."

"That's not the same! I like *this* Tib. I don't care for the other Tibs."

"Little Nancy!" muttered grandfather, musingly, while he laid a soft, lingering touch on my head. "Little, tender-hearted Nancy! Why, the tears are in her eyes! Oh, cheer up, little Nancy! What are you crying for?"

"I don't want Tib to die."

"Now look here, little Nancy; you are crying a little bit because you are fond of Tib, and a great bit because you have been excited and tired, and because it's getting near bedtime."

"No, I don't!" sobbed I, replying to an accusation understood, though not expressed; "I don't feel a bit sleepy, indeed, grandfather."

"You don't know that you do. But grandfather is wiser than little Nancy—which isn't saying much; is it, Donald?"

Donald had been looking on at this scene in mute surprise, I doubt not. He was sorry to see me shed tears, but could scarcely be called sympathetic, inasmuch as he was totally unable to imagine my state of high-strung nervousness. When grandfather appealed to him he got up, and lifting the cat very gently in his arms, brought it to me and made me stroke it. "Look here," he said. "Tib's all right. He's quite jolly, you see, isn't he? And he doesn't know he must die some day, so it don't matter to him."

"Well said, Donald," cried grandfather, clapping him on the shoulder. "You're not morbid, at all events."

"What's morbid?" I asked, trying to wipe

off my tears with a corner of the inaccessible pocket-handkerchief.

"I think little Nancy must wait to have that explained until she is big Nancy. Meanwhile Nancy is not too little to attend to this: it is very nice to love Tib, and be kind to him; but it is still nicer to understand that crying because he must die does him no good, and annoys people who have more sense than poor Tib, and whom you ought to love a little too."

Among my other deep debts to my grandfather, I believe that it is to him I owe that I have not grown up a prey to an exaggerated sensibility. At home this trait was either laughed at or praised to the skies. Only at Mortlands was I taught, by precept and example, how much nobler is self-command than the weak indulgence of every passing emotion. We all easily grow proud of our faults; and I fear I was peculiarly liable to have done so. But grandfather never shrank from telling me plain truths, and inflexibly enforcing his own will whenever it chanced to come into collision with mine.

I sat in silence, broken only by an occasional sniff, stroking Tib, and nestling against grandfather's breast, as he talked to Donald about his school life, and made many inquiries as to his lessons.

I did not understand a great deal that they were saying, but I perceived that grandfather was satisfied with Donald's answers. Gradually the sound of their voices sank into a confused buzz, and anon they became preternaturally loud and distinct, and Donald's barley-sugar-colored hair glittered and expanded into a kind of *auréole* of undefined outline. In a word, I was growing desperately sleepy; but the last thing I remember saying, while I was in the dining-room, was, "Oh no, indeed, I don't want to go to bed one bit, grandfather!"

Then I was dimly conscious of being carried up stairs, and of the ticking of a watch close at my ear—which proves that it must have been grandfather who carried me—and of being laid gently on my little white bed, where Eliza undressed me. The rest is silence.

CHAPTER IV.

THAT week at Mortlands passed away very quickly. I did the honors of the garden to Donald, and showed him all my favorite nooks, and timidly revealed to him a few of the legends my fancy had attached to them. But I did not find him so much interested in these latter as I could have wished. He rather hurt my feelings at first, by observing that the story of the White Cat was nonsense, and couldn't be true; and further, that for his part he was rather glad it wasn't true—for what a bother it would be for a fellow to have a lot of hands messing about him like that prince had in the white cat's palace, and to be dressed and undressed like a baby! And as for the rabbit-hunt they

went to, why what was it to tiger-hunting in India? or buffalo-hunting on the prairies of America? That was the kind of sport for him! And when he grew up he intended to travel and see countries and wonderful things—*real* wonderful things, not make-believe nonsense like fairy stories.

But Donald also was able to make-believe on occasion. He turned the old rustic garden-seat into the deck of the *Erebus*, and, enveloped in one of Keturah's ironing-blankets, and accompanied by one faithful follower (myself, with my knitted woolen jacket tied round my neck by the sleeves, and with Mrs. Abram's muff on my head), we sallied forth across the trackless wastes of snow and blocks of ice—represented by a lettuce-bed and a so-called "grotto," meaning merely a heap of stones and shells overgrown with moss—to discover the North Pole. We did discover it, as far as I remember; and if I am not mistaken, we stuck a twig into the ground to mark the spot, so that we might find the North Pole again without difficulty, and then hastened back to the ship to inform our brave mess-mates of the triumphant success of our expedition.

Another time Tib was made to do duty for a tiger of the jungle (I recollect that his peculiar conformation was accounted for by his having lost his tail in a trap set by the native hunters!), while Donald took aim at him with grandfather's walking-stick from an ambush of gooseberry bushes.

To me the North Pole and a jungle full of tigers were as replete with elements of the marvelous as the "Arabian Nights" or the "Child's Own Book;" and when I found that Donald's realism merely meant substituting one wonder for another, I was perfectly content, and entered into it all with the happy versatility of childhood.

But our great play was *Robinson Crusoe*. Donald implicitly believed in the truth of every detail of that immortal fiction. And as, moreover, it presented the almost unique advantage of a *dramatis personæ* (at least throughout the only part of the story that we concerned ourselves with) which numerically fitted our corps, there was an additional reason for performing it frequently.

Many an hour have we spent strengthening the fortifications around the cave, digging intrenchments, and "getting things neat and handsome about us" in the interior of the dwelling. Many a time, in my character of man Friday, have I spluttered and made faces over food cooked with salt, and smiled and nodded energetically to express approval of victuals dressed without that condiment. (Our fare, when it left Keturah's hands, was mostly bread and treacle, or it might be a slice of seed-cake; but by the time it reached our desolate island, behind the big elder bushes at the bottom of the garden, it was sure to have turned into goat's flesh, turtles' eggs, or wood-pigeon.) Many a time has Havilah, grandfa-

ther's "odd man," whom I have before alluded to, been assailed with a brisk volley of musketry from a rolling-fire and the walking-stick, which had already done execution on the tiger of the jungle, and compelled, blood-thirsty cannibal that he was, to take to his canoe, and disappear across the ocean into the distant brew-house.

"Many a time," I have said, and yet all these things happened within a week! But days were long then, and full of incidents. Tedium was unknown, as was that mournful kind of experience which teaches that to-morrow must be sad because it will be analogous to to-day.

It may be remembered that Eliza had spoken to me before Donald's arrival of a contemplated tea-drinking. She obtained leave for "Master Ayrle" to join the party, and we all three went to her friend's house one afternoon.

Eliza's friend was called Kitchen. We children thought this a very odd name, but we refrained from saying so, for fear of hurting Eliza's feelings.

Mr. Kitchen lived in a tiny house in a remote, silent street called Burton's Gardens. All streets in Horsingham were more or less silent, except at "race time," when the whole town moved and babbled like a stream suddenly set free from frost; but Burton's Gardens was perhaps the duller and least-frequented spot in Horsingham. On our way thither Eliza gave us a long account of the Kitchens, from which it appeared that Mr. Kitchen was a widower, with one son and one daughter; that he was by trade a coach-maker, and had been foreman many years in his father-in-law's shop; that his father-in-law, Mr. Green, had saved a great deal of money; that the said Mr. Green was rather "near," but very strict in his moral views; that Mr. Kitchen's son was apprenticed to his father's and grandfather's business, while his daughter kept house; and that Mr. Green was confidently expected to bequeath his wealth to his grandchildren, Matthew and Alice Kitchen.

"So you see, Miss Anne," said Eliza, following out a sequence of ideas with which I was not then so familiar as I have since become, "the Kitchens are *most* respectable."

I should not deem it necessary to commemorate this tea-drinking but for the fact of its being the occasion of introducing me to people who were afterward closely connected with some of the chief incidents of my life. My remembrance of the evening has doubtless been greatly assisted by my subsequent knowledge of the people at whose house I passed it.

There was a strip of garden inclosed within green palings in front of the house—a garden so small as only to contain one flower-bed, of about the size and shape of the apple-pies Keturah gave us at dinner. A white chrysanthemum occupied this bed, which was bordered with London pride, and surrounded by a path not much broader than my sash, strewn in a geometrical pattern with various colored gravel.

I remember that Donald and I admired this vastly.

We were received very kindly. The Kitchens were not at all gloomy, as I had expected. They laughed and talked and ate with great apparent enjoyment. I thought this rather strange, for the two or three books on a side-table that I peeped into (I could never see a book without longing to open it) appeared to contain matter of a very depressing and awful description; and I had heard Eliza say that the preacher at the chapel they attended was "enough to make your blood run cold" sometimes.

The whole was, as I have said, tiny; and the parlor we took tea in seemed scarcely big enough at first sight to hold us all; but we found room enough after a while. There was a great old-fashioned escritoire opposite to the window, made of shining black wood. In the centre of it was a flap covered with green baize, that turned down so as to form a writing-desk; and on this flap were disposed a huge Bible, an illustrated edition of the "Pilgrim's Progress," and a white china elephant with a gilt trunk, and a gilt turret on his back, which turret was an ingenious contrivance for holding ink; and there was a steel pen stuck into a hole in the turret, and I noticed that the steel pen appeared to be the only article in the room that did not look bright and clean. It was very rusty and dirty, and the wooden holder was thick with old ink-stains. I supposed that when Mr. Kitchen wanted to write a letter he took a better pen from some one of the many drawers in the escritoire; but on confiding this supposition to Donald, he answered that very likely Mr. Kitchen never did write letters.

Alice Kitchen, Donald and I decided, was a very pretty girl. She had row upon row of stiff light brown curls all round her head, and a fair skin, and she wore a blue bead necklace. Mr. Kitchen was an elderly man, who did not impress me particularly. He seemed rather fond of making jokes, most of which I did not understand, and he ate an enormous quantity of butter-cakes, saying, every now and then, "Alice, my daughter, go and see if the little maiden can not find yet another batch of butter-cakes in the oven. Let us enjoy the merciful gifts of the Lord. Let us not receive them with a thankless heart."

Donald and I very much approved of this doctrine, and devoured so much pastry as makes me bilious even to think of nowadays, though I do not remember that any evil consequences followed it then.

Both Mr. Kitchen and Alice appeared delighted at the quantity we ate, and kept hospitably pressing us to take more. This, I reflected, was very different from Mrs. Abram, who had a fixed idea that we should infallibly overeat ourselves at every meal. I have thought since that she possibly attributed this to the innate depravity of our unregenerate natures. I suppose that she herself must have suffered fre-

quently from indigestion, for I remember that she used to "quack" herself, as grandfather called it, in secret. And I have seen him ruthlessly confiscate many a little round pasteboard box, wherever he laid hands on it. As for myself, I believe no child of the contemporary generation was physicked less. Grandfather had as mortal an aversion to dosing folks "as though medicine were poison," as Mrs. Abram plaintively observed; "and he's a doctor too!"

We had half done tea before Matthew Kitchen came in. He had been detained at the shop by stress of work.

"That is," explained Mr. Kitchen, "he hadn't ought to have been expected to stay over-hours, but his grandfather thinks no end of Mat, and has a fancy that so long as he's there things goes right. And Mat nat'rally don't like to put his grandfather out."

I took a strong and instant dislike to this young man. He was clumsily and awkwardly made, and moved in a loose-jointed fashion. He had red cheeks and black eyes, a shapeless snub nose, and coarse, pouting lips of unspeakable sullenness, surmounted by a black down of incipient mustache.

His father and sister seemed anxious to propitiate him, I thought; for they made room for him eagerly, and Alice put fresh tea into the pot, and sent into the kitchen for hot cakes, earnestly assuring Matthew that they had been put aside specially for him. He said grace in a growling bass voice, and afterward a hush seemed to fall upon us all. Even the butter-cakes seemed to have lost their savor; but that may have been because we had already eaten so many.

The only incident of that evening worth recording is a sudden blaze of defiance elicited from Donald by Mat Kitchen. The word "blaze," perhaps, is too unsteady and fleeting to describe Donald's condition. It was rather a glow. It happened thus: Mr. Kitchen had been telling me (in an elaborately easy style, as of one painfully stooping to my childish level) how Dr. Hewson, my grandfather, had attended his (Kitchen's) late wife in her last illness; and how, although it was impossible to save her life, grandfather's care and skill alleviated her sufferings. I listened with much interest, and thought it kind and pleasant of Mr. Kitchen to speak so well of grandfather, when Mat (whom, in my subsequent knowledge of him, I discovered to be constitutionally averse to hear other people praised) interposed gruffly with the remark that the skill of the godless profiteth nothing.

"Grandfather isn't godless!" cried I, flushed and trembling in a moment.

"No, deary, no," said Alice, soothingly. "Don't ye mind. Matthew is very zealous in testifying. But he don't mean it, deary."

But this equivocal praise did not suit Matthew's temper.

"Yes, I do mean it!" he said, apparently beginning to enjoy himself more than he had

hitherto done throughout the evening, and letting his pouting mouth relax into something like a smile. "I ain't a-going to be a respecter of persons. It won't pay to fly in the face of Providence for the sake of worldly men or worldly matters."

"Well, well, my lad," said Mr. Kitchen, rather uneasily. "Thou'st testified; now hold thy peace. We all think well of Dr. Hewson's skill in the healing art, and of his kindness in a carnal and unregenerate sense. That's enough."

"Nay, father," persisted Matthew, doggedly, shaking his head and shooting a vicious side-glance from his bright black eyes, like a horse that has got the bit between his teeth, and fully understands all that that implies; "nay, that is *not* enough. When is Dr. Hewson seen among the congregations of the godly? What is his religion?"

"That's no business of yours!" cried Donald, stoutly. He rose to his feet and faced Matthew, who, however, feigned not to notice him.

"Is he not as one of the vain physicians—as those who hold by worldly science, which is foolishness, and neglect heavenly things, which only are wisdom?"

"You come along, Anne!" said Donald, seizing his cap and taking me by the hand. "I sha'n't stop here to hear your grandfather abused. Come along out this minute!"

He had got hold of my little cloak by this time, and was trying to huddle me into it, with the hood trailing on the ground, and the hem round my shoulders. I was crying. Eliza, confused by her deafness, looked thoroughly bewildered; and Alice was vainly trying to make peace, but only succeeding in adding to the tumult.

No persuasion could move Donald to remain. He was quite inflexible, and insisted so masterfully on Eliza's dressing me and bringing me away, that we were absolutely on the point of leaving the house, when Mr. Kitchen said:

"Young Sir, you are under my roof, and have partaken of my humble hospitality. I do not think this a becoming manner of taking your leave."

Donald faced round in a moment.

"I don't mean to behave badly to you, Sir," he said; "but what does your son pitch into Dr. Hewson for? Dr. Hewson is a gentleman; and I think your son is very ignorant when he talks about science being 'foolishness,' and things like that. I'm very much obliged to you and Alice for the butter-cakes," added poor Donald, with a touch of bathos, "but I sha'n't stay here to hear things said against Dr. Hewson all the same. And *you* wouldn't like to hear your friends spoken ill of yourself!" he exclaimed, turning full upon Matthew with a strength of earnest indignation in his childish face that I shall never forget. "And I call it mean and cowardly to speak ill of people behind their backs; especially people that have never done you any harm, but have been kind to you; and really good people wouldn't do it.

So all your talk is just cant, Mr. Matthew; and if I was big enough I'd thrash you."

With this final burst he marched out of the place, holding me by the hand, and followed by Eliza, who was a mere image of confusion and dismay.

I do not remember that much was said to us afterward on the subject of our stormy exit from Mr. Kitchen's house. Grandfather, I think, held a theory akin to that of the old lady who laid it down as a rule that children should be treated with a little *wholesome neglect*. At all events, he always avoided "making a fuss" about any of our sayings and doings, either to praise or to blame.

But I have a distinct recollection of hearing the matter debated by the female members of the household. Each took a different view. Eliza—who had the gentlest temper in the world—mildly said that she thought Master Ayrle had been a bit too hot; Matthew Kitchen *would* testify, in season or out of season; and, of course, it wasn't like as if he'd said any thing against Dr. Hewson in a worldly spirit.

"I suppose you call it showing a heavenly spirit, for a young bellowing calf like Mat Kitchen to set himself up in judgment on a gentleman like master! And one as smoothed his own mother's last moments, and attended her as though she'd ha' been the foremost lady in the land, and took no fee because they was poor and in trouble at the time. I've no patience!" exclaimed Keturah, indignantly. And when Eliza meekly replied that no doubt Matthew had been moved by a sense of duty, and that it must have been a painful trial to the natural man to speak as he had spoken, Keturah rejoined with withering contempt: "Don't you believe a word on it! *His* nat'ral man's the kind o' creetur as hates to be grateful; that's what it amounts to. It ain't hard for fellows like Mat Kitchen to do their duty so long as they can make out as their duty is to pick all the hard words from the Bible and pitch 'em at folks' heads! To see them kind o' people ready to burst wi' overbearingness, and calling it religion! Ugh! it fairly turns my stummick!"

Mrs. Abram, as far as I was able to understand her utterances, attributed Matthew's want of charity to the fact of his being a dissenter. She moaned a good deal, I remember, and seemed to think we were all—including grandfather—in a bad way.

Soon after our visit to the Kitchens the time of my parents' absence from home came to an end, and I had to return to Water-Eardley. I left Mortlands with the hope of soon seeing some of its inmates again; for grandfather promised to bring Donald to see us, and he kept his word.

I had a great deal to say to mother when I reached home. I found that she was aware of Donald's arrival, and that she remembered having seen his father, Captain Ayrle, when she was a little girl, and before he went to India.

"I think," said I, one day, very gravely, "that when I grow up I shall marry Donald."

"Oh, indeed!" said mother, laughing, and stroking my hair with both her hands. "You have settled that, have you?"

"Well, I told Donald that I thought I should marry him."

"And what did he say?"

"He said he thought he shouldn't mind."

This speech was repeated that same afternoon to my father at dinner. He was immensely amused, and threw himself back in his chair to laugh—a good deal to my confusion and perplexity.

Of Donald's visit to Water-Eardley I have retained no special remembrance. But I do recollect that my father asked grandfather's leave to take him (Donald) to the races, whither I also was to go for the first time, and that grandfather peremptorily refused, and there was sharp discussion—almost a quarrel—about it. Also I remember that, before going back to Mortlands, Donald confided to me that if my father would let that young black bull be turned into the river-side meadow by himself, he thought he could lasso him as they do in South America.

"For," said he, argumentatively, "you know it's more skill than strength that does it."

But my father's objections to the experiment proved insuperable, and Donald went away without having lassoed the black bull.

CHAPTER V.

WE went to the races—father, mother, and I—on the day on which the great cup was run for. That was a race famous throughout the length and breadth of the land; and the beautiful Horsingham course was crowded with people from far and near.

I scarcely recognized it under its changed aspect. The bright green turf, where I and Selina had gathered mushrooms many a morning, was trampled and strewn with a squalid litter of orange-peel, and nut-shells, and fluttering, crumpled papers. Merciless feet—brute and human—crushed the light elastic harebell and the short-stemmed daisy. There was a roar of voices in the air that ebbed and flowed like a tide—now louder, now lower. We were in an open carriage, in a good position to see every thing that passed. Strange, grotesque figures came and went in motley garb. I was amused and excited, and at the same time a little frightened by the unwonted throng. I remember once that vague feeling of terror to which I was subject took possession of me as the panting horses dashed past us, followed by the terrible roar of voices that seemed to rush along in their wake, as flame rushes through stubble.

I pressed up close to mother in silence, and turned my face away from the surging, shouting crowd. Then there was a pause, and an-

other rush and roar as the horses came back to the winning-post. And then they said that the race was over, and that the favorite had been beaten.

Father had gone away before the great race began, and at its close he came back to the carriage, laughing and talking very excitedly. And he made Dodd pour out some Champagne, and told mother she ought to drink a glass to celebrate the occasion. And then he made me taste the foaming wine also, and said that he had been in luck.

I remember—how well I remember!—that mother shook her head and told him that he had been naughty, and that he had promised not to bet. And father turned quite red and angry in a moment, and asked how could she talk such nonsense? It could not be called betting; merely a few shillings. But it had been a mere chance, the favorite not winning; and so he had won ten times what he had risked. And why hadn't she the good-nature to be pleased at seeing him in good spirits, instead of croaking and preaching?

This impressed me as much with surprise as pain. For I was happily unaccustomed to hear harsh words pass between my parents. The crowd began to move away from the course. Our horses were put to, and we drove slowly away amidst the press of other vehicles. As we were departing, father said to me, giving me a kiss, "Well, Anne, and how did *you* like the races?"

I answered that I liked it all very much, especially the little boy with the blue frock on, and the long white stockings that had sparkling silver things all over them, and the dog who danced on his hind-legs when the organ played. But that I wished those men that rode on the pretty horses would not whip them so, for I was sure the poor horses ran as fast as ever they could; and, for my part, I thought it was cruel.

But to this father made answer impatiently that I was a little goose, and that the horses liked the excitement of racing very much—which, however, I secretly doubted.

The air and the wine, which I was quite unused to, made me drowsy, and I fell fast asleep. I did not awake until we were driving in at the gate of Water-Eardley. I found myself tenderly covered with a warm shawl and with a cushion under my head. As I opened my eyes, I saw father holding mother's hand in his, and heard him say, "My darling Lucy, what is the use of making promises? Can't you trust me?"

Donald's arrival at Horsingham had been a great event in my life, and his departure left a blank for a long time. The prospect of his going away drove the races out of my mind. He was to return to Mortlands, but not until the midsummer holidays. Next summer! It seemed worlds away. You might almost as well have talked to me of next century.

I well remember a parting scene that took place the night before Donald returned to school.

I had been spending the day at Mortlands. We children had revisited our favorite spots in the garden, and I had received injunctions from Donald as to the administration of a good deal of his property in Robinson Crusoe's Island during his absence. Also I had promised to look after some guinea-pigs he had purchased. He had at first had some intention of carrying them to school in his pocket, but grandfather dissuaded him. So the guinea-pigs were left under Havilah's charge, subject to my occasional supervision. I was not fond of the guinea-pigs. They had a peculiar mobility of nose which distressed me. And my private opinion was that they were not really affectionate. But I promised to be kind to them for Donald's sake. It had been a busy morning, and after dinner we all sat round the fire, gathered together for the first time that day. Grandfather and Mrs. Abram were in their usual places. I was seated on my little stool with Tib on my knee; and Donald stood by grandfather's chair. Grandfather had one hand on the boy's head, and was talking to him kindly and earnestly. As I looked up at the two it suddenly struck me that Donald, who seemed so tall and strong and wise to me, was but a little fellow beside grandfather after all. I began to cry at the image I had conjured up of Donald, friendless and unprotected, all those many miles away, among big, rough boys, who, perhaps, might even beat and ill-use him, as Jackson had beaten Steenie.

Grandfather lifted me up from my stool on to his knee, and soothed and comforted me with great gentleness and patience; but my tears continued to flow, and my sobs went on crescendo. I was vexed at Donald's apparent indifference, and I had a vague notion that if I cried very much it would pain Donald, and punish him for not being so sorry to go as I was at his going. I was perfectly aware that this feeling was evil, and I afterward suffered severely from remorse, for my conscience, as I have said, was as inevitable and implacable as fate; nevertheless, I yielded to it, and continued to utter ever-increasing sounds of lamentation.

"Come, Anne," said Donald at length, much disconcerted by my convulsive grief. "I say, Anne, don't cry any more. What's the good? Come! Have a snap."

With that he drew forth and presented to me a species of confection popular in Hørsingham. It was a treacly kind of cake, full of holes, like a very thin section of petrified sponge, and it was known as "gingerbread snap," or, more briefly, as "snap."

Donald, in all good faith, held out a sticky snap, which had grown flaccid from a prolonged residence in his pocket. But far from accepting this singular panacea for woe, I clenched my little fist and struck him as hard a blow as I could with it—to his profound astonishment.

"Little Nancy!" said grandfather, in a deep, concentrated voice, which had the instant effect of making me try to check my sobs—still them

at once I could not. They had got beyond my control. "Little Nancy!" I trembled, conscience-stricken.

"See now what all your affection is worth! You are sorry that Donald is going away, and that is natural. But you are also *angry*—angry that he too does not scream and sob and distress every one around him. And so, in your selfish desire to vex him, because you are vexed, you let yourself be ungrateful and violent and foolishly ill-tempered. I could not have believed this of my little Nancy."

I was so overwhelmed by the essential truth of this reproof, so confused at my childish mind being thus plainly read, so stricken to the heart by the thought that now Donald, seeing what manner of little girl I really was, would love me no longer, that I slid down from grandfather's knee on to the hearth-rug, burying my face in an agony of sorrow and mortification, the bitterness of which, while it lasted, I am inclined to believe has never been surpassed throughout my subsequent life.

There was a silent pause that seemed to last for an hour, and that was only broken by Mrs. Abram inarticulately murmuring something about the Evil One—she habitually attributed all troubles to his direct and personal interference in the affairs of mankind—and by my stifled sobs.

Then I felt Donald kneel down close by my side, and he whispered in my ear, "Come, Anne, I say, don't cry any more; I shall come back at midsummer, you know. And I don't mind your hitting me; it didn't hurt me a bit. Come!"

"I d—didn't wa—a—ant the snap. But I—I—I've been so naughty. You'll n—never, n—never love me any mo—o—ore!"

"Oh yes I shall; all right. Come, don't cry. Here, Anne, I say, do have a snap."

I accepted the snap on purely sentimental grounds, for I did not in the least want to eat it, and clasped it convulsively in one hand, while I tried to wipe my eyes on the inaccessible pocket-handkerchief with the other. Heaven knows my grief was genuine enough, and yet at that very moment I began to lick off a few tears that had trickled down at the corners of my mouth, and to speculate wonderingly on the phenomenon of their saltiness.

Of course I was finally kissed and forgiven; and I sat close beside Donald all the rest of the evening, holding his hand in mine. Once, in the fullness of my gratitude for reinstatement into his affections, I raised his broad sturdy little fingers to my lips, and kissed them humbly. And I recollect observing, as I did so, that they smelled of slate-pencil.

He went away the next day on the top of the mail-coach, looking very small up there, I thought, beside the burly men in great-coats. And for a long time, or for a time that seemed long to me then, I missed him sorely. When the spring began to clothe the trees with green again, I began to talk of Donald's return, and

to look forward to it eagerly. Grandfather did not say much on the subject, but I knew very well that he, too, would be glad to see the boy again. He was a favorite with the whole household at Mortlands. Keturah had treated him with unexampled indulgence. I remember that my sense of justice had many a time been outraged by the difference made between him and me in sundry matters of tearing and spoiling clothes, etc. I could see no such fundamental diversity between a rent in Donald's trowsers, and a splotch of ink or garden-mould on my pinafore, as made the one a pardonable peccadillo, and the other a serious lapse from virtue. But, although my reason rebelled against accepting the statement frequently made by Mrs. Abram—"Donald is a boy, love; boys always tear their clothes; it's in the nature of them"—as any satisfactory excuse for condoning his destructiveness (since it was clear that it was equally in the nature of *me* to dirty my pinafore and crush my straw bonnet out of shape), I bore Donald no grudge for the preference shown to him. I loved him too well to be jealous of the love that was given to him; though I think it likely that I might have been jealous of the love that he gave, had any competitor in his affections come in my way in those days.

Be that as it may, every one liked Donald at Mortlands, and looked forward to his return. But there came a sad disappointment. Grandfather read us a letter one morning from a certain Colonel Fisher, who was a distant relative of Captain Ayrle, saying that he had obtained leave from the boy's father to take him to Scotland for the holidays, and that he thought it might be advantageous to the boy to make friends among his own people. A week or two afterward came a letter from Captain Ayrle himself, written a long time previously, to the effect that his comrade and third cousin was returning home from India with his family, and would look after Donald, and receive him during the holidays. And Captain Ayrle added that he hoped Colonel Fisher would reach England in time to save grandfather the bore of having the boy in his house at all, as it must necessarily be a nuisance to so quiet a household as Mortlands to have a noisy school-boy suddenly brought into their midst. And it was only his (Captain Ayrle's) reliance on grandfather's old friendship that had ever emboldened him to ask such a thing, in the difficulty of knowing to whom to intrust the boy. Great was the outcry when these disappointing missives arrived. As for me, although in honest truth I believe that time had already begun to make Donald's image fainter in my mind, I was in despair. It was my first great disappointment. I wanted grandfather to write and *demand* Donald without delay.

"Tut, little Nancy," said grandfather, slowly. "It will be better for the boy to live a healthy boy life among his own kith and kin in Scotland than to come here. Yes; he would

have found it drearier and duller as time went on. Unless, indeed— Dry your eyes, little Nancy; I am sorry, too."

Two events soon happened to occupy my attention. The first event was the birth of a little brother; the second, my consequent going to school. The simple lessons that mother was used to give me were all interrupted by baby's arrival. Mother was not strong for a long time after his birth, and I was banished to my nursery during the greater part of the day. All the happiness that home had ever afforded me was gained in my parents' society. Debarred from that, Water-Eardley Manor was but an uncongenial place to me. I could not be always at Mortlands; and, if I could have been, there were no means there of prosecuting my education; so it was settled that I should go to school.

There was a lady who kept a boarding-school in a fine old-fashioned house in Horsingham, on the outskirts of the town, and not very far from the race-course. I was to be what was called a weekly boarder, going home—or to my grandfather's house, which was nearer—every Saturday, and returning to school on Monday morning. I looked forward to this change (as well as I can recall my feeling on the subject) with, on the whole, more pleasure than pain. But it was not without a sinking at the heart, and some bitter tears, that I said "good-by" to mother, and gave a farewell kiss to my little baby brother sleeping on her breast.

CHAPTER VI.

THERE is no need, for the clear understanding of the rest of these pages, that I should describe my school life at length. It was calm and monotonous. I can compare it to the course of the little streamlets that intersected some of the grass-lands on my father's farm. The natural channel was banked up, and guided without being distorted altogether from its original direction. Little ripples sometimes ruffled it; deeper pools lay brown and silent beneath its banks; blue forget-me-nots made the eye glad with their beauty here and there; there were reaches of weedless grass, green and smooth; and again there were tangles of hemlock, and spear-like clusters of pithy rushes. Slowly the little streamlet slid onward with a steady, secure current, until it joined the wider river, and must thenceforth flow through calm and storm unguided to the sea.

The greater part of my life during eight years was spent at school. Our governess, Mrs. Lane, was a widowed gentlewoman; tall, slender, stately, with a soft voice and a stern eye. To her the school was the world. Had she been the matron of a jail, or head-nurse in a hospital, I am inclined to believe that the universe would speedily have presented itself to her mind as all jail or all hospital. She had a passion for systematizing such as I have met

with in no other Englishwoman. Her rules were inflexible, because they were the strictly logical result of her principles. Given the premise, Mrs. Lane's deductions must infallibly follow. Her intellect, though shallow, was very clear. She always reminded me of a fine frosty day: cloudless, pale sky, bright sunshine (delightful to look upon, impossible to bask in), and a little sharp *nip* pervading the serene atmosphere. Fortunately it was among Mrs. Lane's principles that ample and generous nourishment was necessary for young growing creatures. We were well fed and well lodged.

How well I remember Mrs. Abram (who, poor soul! had once been nearly starved to death at school herself) expressing the greatest solicitude about my diet, and making a suggestion, unknown to grandfather, that I should be provided with a tin case of captain's biscuits to stave off the pangs of hunger, should I find myself reduced to a low ebb. I very much approved this scheme, and was eager to adopt it, with one trifling alteration, namely, that the tin case should contain, not captain's biscuits, but "snaps" and macaroons. But Mrs. Abram would not hear of either; partly because macaroons and snaps were bilious, as she said; but also, as I was secretly convinced, because they were nice! However, I had not been many weeks at school before it became obvious to all who looked on me that no such provision as Mrs. Abram had contemplated could be needful. I have mentioned that my health was delicate when I was a young child. But I grew stronger year by year, and I have been throughout my adult life a singularly healthy woman.

The few events that marked the course of those eight years which I have said I spent chiefly at school may be briefly presented before the little banked-in rivulet leaves its straight, safe channels for the wider flood.

Selina, my nurse-maid, got married, and who should her bridegroom be but Donald's old enemy, Mat Kitchen! I felt there was somehow a suitability in the match, although I was vaguely sorry for Selina, too. It had been brought about in this wise: My father had bought a pretty little pony-phaeton as a present for mother, out of his winnings on the day of the great race which I was taken to see. Some accidental injury having been done to this vehicle, Mat Kitchen was sent out to Water-Eardley by his grandfather, Mr. Green, the coach-builder, to see what repairs were necessary to it. On this occasion, and on several subsequent occasions, he saw Selina, and was attracted by her. Mat was by this time receiving good wages, being, I believe, skilled in his trade. Then, too, he had the prospect of an inheritance from his grandfather, and was considered altogether an eligible match.

"I was vexed with your father for buying me that phaeton," said mother once, thoughtfully. "I said I was sure that money got by betting would bring no blessing with it. But

it has brought good luck to Selina, at all events. It has got her a husband."

Such amount of good luck as was involved in marrying Mat Kitchen certainly did fall to Selina's share. My parents helped to furnish her little house for her. I was taken to see it before the wedding; and there I saw the bridegroom-elect, looking, as I thought, more sullen than ever. He had shaved his dark upper lip, and wore a fringe of black whiskers. He eyed the furniture in a glum manner, and let fall no syllable of gratitude or gratification for the presents Selina had received. I could not help fancying—probably erroneously—that he kept remembering the evening when Donald and I had taken tea at his father's house, and secretly enjoying the recollection of having made himself so unpleasant. But he called me "little miss," and was not uncivil. Alice Kitchen was there too. She begged me to go and see her and her father some day, when Mat should be married. I did go one afternoon on my way from school to Mortlands, accompanied by Eliza. I had discovered—I can not now tell exactly by what means—with the intuitive quickness of a child's observation, that Eliza was afflicted at Matthew Kitchen's marriage, and would have liked to marry him herself. Also I noticed that Mr. Kitchen and Alice seemed sorry for her, and made much of her, and I drew the conclusion that they would have preferred to have her for a daughter and sister rather than Selina. Mr. Kitchen's little parlor looked exactly the same as of yore, even to the white and gold elephant, with the rusty steel pen in his castle. I had some delicious butter-cakes, baked expressly for me. And they talked of Donald. Mr. Kitchen observed that he (Donald) was "a high-mettled young youth;" and seemed to think the phrase a happy one, repeating it more than once.

And now, as I look back, I perceive that during my school life the image of Donald had been fading, fading, until it had become the mistiest outline of a memory. Were it not for hearing him spoken of, I should, I feel sure, have forgotten him at this time altogether. Should the reader ask, "How, then, is it that you have been able to give so many minute details of your first acquaintance with the boy?" I shall reply by another question. Do you not now, O reader, if your years number more than some twoscore or so, recall the events of your childhood more clearly than you could have done at eighteen?

In the leafy summer-time we see only the screen of foliage that borders our pathway. Every hedgerow is full of life. Every branch bears its bloom. But when autumn, like some grave and wise enchanter of old time, touches the world with his golden wand, and the transmuted leaves fall yellow from the bough, we look back through the open tracery, and the landscape we have traversed lies softly clear beneath our gaze.

The seasons succeeded each other, and my

life continued to be monotonous and tranquil outwardly. Within there was growth and struggle and change; as, I suppose, there must be in all young souls. Those by whom I was surrounded remained unaltered; or they altered so gradually that I scarcely as yet perceived any change in them. Only one thing I observed in my visits home; namely, that father had quite fallen into the practice of going to the races every spring and autumn. Sometimes he even went away to our county town to attend a great race there. Also I noticed that grandfather, who used to inveigh so heartily against horse-racing, had now become gravely silent on the subject at Water-Eardley; or, at all events, he was so whenever I was present. Once, however, on going into our dining-room, after dinner, with a message from mother to my grandfather, who had been spending the day with us, I found the two men in a vehement dispute over their wine. Father was hot and flushed and angry. Grandfather's face was as stern and set as stone, only his gray eyes sparkled. As I entered I heard father say, sneeringly, "I wonder, Dr. Hewson, that you, who have such very *liberal* views on most subjects, should be so prejudiced on this point!" Whereunto grandfather made answer, "I do not think, George, that you in the least degree apprehend what my views *are* on any important subject. At least, let me assure you that my views do not include proclaiming full liberty of blackguardism to blackguards."

Then they both saw me standing scared in the doorway, and ceased speaking. My message put an end to the discussion, for it was to beg grandfather to come and look at my little brother Harold. The child had been ailing for some days; and mother said he seemed fevered and uneasy in his sleep; and she was anxious about him.

Ah! I am coming to a dark place in my young life; to a valley of shadow, watered by a fountain of tears. My little baby brother! How we watch the sweet round cheeks growing hot and crimson, and listen to the piteous little cry, "Oh, mamma; oh, mamma; Harry *so thirsty!*"

Almost more piteous is it, when he is for a time free from suffering, to see the little creature laugh and try to play his old romping games with me, and open wide appealing eyes when he finds that his baby strength no longer suffices to do as he has been used to do. For he grows weaker and weaker, and wastes and fades day by day. And at length the end comes. Care and skill, and the mother's sleepless devotion, can not save him. He falls softly into a slumber, with one little wasted hand clasping my finger, and the other laid upon his innocent lips, like a symbolic statue of silence. And the silence comes down solemnly—solemnly and sweetly. The waxen face changes to marble, and the tiny hand grows chill. I am brought face to face with an awful, irrevocable fact, that is blind and deaf to my sorrow.

After her baby's death, mother was ill for some time; ailing for some time longer. She and father went away to a sea-side place: very far away it seemed to my imagination. In my parents' absence I spent every Saturday and Sunday at Mortlands. I went with Mrs. Abram to a musty-smelling church, with damp, stuffy pews, and a black, shining, wooden gallery. And there a clergyman preached long sermons, "full of sound and fury, signifying"—many things which I am averse to contemplate, even at this present period of my life; but which seemed to afford Mrs. Abram a gloomy and ghoul-like satisfaction. Hideous images of the charnel-house, from which my soul revolted. How he harped on despair and dread, as if they made sweet music! No word of human love and charity can I recall that issued from his lips in the pulpit. "Good-will toward men" had been omitted from his gospel. That is not what the angel voices sang in *his* ears. Glad tidings of good things were revealed to no mortal by his clerical voice. Dressed in a little brief authority, he dealt out death and damnation to all and sundry. But when he descended to the vestry, he grew milder; and by the time he had donned his coat, and reached the church-door, he became human, and held his little children gently by the hand. I even heard that in sickness and poverty no one was more benevolent than he; that he gave liberally out of his slender means, and grudged neither time nor trouble to his needy parishioners. All which things, as I grew older, I kept in my heart, and pondered them.

Mother came back from the sea-side with restored health. All fell into its usual track at Water-Eardley, as it used to be before our pretty blossom came and peeped upon the earth, and then folded his soft leaves again forever. At Mrs. Lane's I did not form any of the romantic friendships which are popularly supposed to make a necessary part of a school-girl's experience. I was not very gregarious by nature. I was fastidious in my choice of companionship. And then, doubtless, I was devoid of many qualities which insure popularity. I had very few acquaintances in Horsingham. Grandfather, as I have said, had lived in almost total seclusion from society for as long as I can remember. And the years, as they advanced, rather confirmed than diminished his dislike to mix with the world. My father's friends and relations lived chiefly in the country. Still there were one or two houses in Horsingham which I occasionally visited. Sir Peter Bunny's was one of these houses. Sir Peter had once been mayor, and was knighted on the occasion of heading some deputation during his mayoralty. He was a thin, handsome old gentleman, with dark eyebrows and white hair and small features. His portrait was exhibited one year at the Royal Academy; and the legend ran in Horsingham that enthusiastic visitors would point it out to each other as the very type and ideal of an aristocratic gen-

tleman of ancient lineage, and would turn to their catalogues and say, "Bunny! Sir Peter Bunny! Of the Shropshire Bunnys, I wonder?" in a very genteel and knowing manner. But we Horsingham folks knew that Sir Peter made his money as a maltster, and that Lady Bunny's mother kept a boarding-house at Scarborough; and that despite the big coat of arms on their carriage, and the crest blazoned on every possible and impossible article of furniture in the house, the Bunnys are, in the pure eyes of *county* society, "nobody"—mere impalpable figments of the vulgar brain. They, and their man-servant, and their maid-servant, their cattle—and, in short, every thing save the stranger within their gates (who is usually, in his own opinion, somebody, and eats Sir Peter's dinners in a manner calculated to prove it), being in any polite sense the mere baseless fabric of a vision.

Despite this Berkeleian theory of the Bunnys' existence, they were greatly liked and respected. Their youngest daughter was a school-fellow of mine, and I sometimes took tea at her father's house, and spent a quiet evening there. Also, I had made the acquaintance of Mr. Arkwright, the curate of Mrs. Abram's favorite clergyman, whose direful ministrations I have spoken of; and of Mrs. Arkwright and the little Arkwrights—and the name of these latter is Legion. I never met Mr. Arkwright without being possessed by a yearning pity for him. The phrase sounds absurd, in our relative positions; nevertheless, it is strictly true. My more mature judgment leads me to doubt whether the case were one calling for all the compassion I lavished on it. But as a very young girl—little more than a child when I first knew him—I was unfeignedly sorry for the Reverend Edwin Arkwright in my heart. He was so very poor, and he had so many young children, and his wife, though doubtless the partner of his cares, appeared to me so little calculated to be the soother of his sorrows. He was known by all Horsingham to be in debt; and yet no one could blame him for extravagance. I once said to Mrs. Lane (I scarcely know how my speech was brought about, for my communications with her were rarely impulsive or confidential), "How dreadful it must be to be in debt! To feel that you have had people's goods, and have not paid for them!" And Mrs. Lane looked at me very strangely, and said, Yes; she supposed it must be dreadful; and hoped I should always continue to think in the same way.

A day or two afterward I was passing Mrs. Lane's sitting-room, the door of which was ajar, and I was surprised and startled to hear grandfather's voice within.

"We will settle the whole account now, if you please, Mrs. Lane," he said. "Three-quarters' schooling are due, are they not?"

Before I could gather presence of mind to move away, the door of the sitting-room was fully opened, and grandfather and Mrs. Lane came out into the hall.

"Anne, how pale you are!" exclaimed my governess. She looked quite alarmed, and made a movement forward to take hold of me. Grandfather gave me a searching glance, and said, "May Anne come home with me to Mortlands now, Mrs. Lane? I know that it is out of the regular course of things; but it will only anticipate the half holiday by one day, and I shall feel obliged to you if you will permit it."

Mrs. Lane at once assented. I think she fancied that my grandfather's medical eye detected some incipient illness in me. But there was none; I had merely been startled and seized upon by a vague feeling of uneasiness, which had immediately translated itself in my countenance.

Grandfather took me home to his house; and as soon as we arrived at Mortlands he bade me follow him into his study. I obeyed with a beating heart. I could recall no such summons having happened previously. He kissed me and placed me in a chair, and then sat down opposite to me.

"Anne," said he, "what did you hear me say to Mrs. Lane? I saw in your face that you had been shocked and startled."

I told him what I had heard; adding, "How could it be, dear grandfather, that so much should be owing to Mrs. Lane? I had no idea—I thought—"

I stopped with twitching lips. An attempt to utter another syllable would have resulted in a burst of tears, and I was resolved not to give way to that weakness without a struggle to retain my self-command.

"Little Nancy, I did not know that the money was owing until yesterday. When I did know it, I got your mother to let me pay it—for her."

There was an almost imperceptible pause before the two last syllables, but my ear detected, my mind marked it. However, I did not press grandfather with any further questions at that time. He told me that all was well at Water-Eardley, and reassured me on the whole.

"By-the-way, little Nancy," he said, just before dismissing me from the study, "when you go home you will miss the hunters. That is to say, you might miss them if you chanced to go near the stable; or the servants might speak to you of them. In any case, do not say any thing to your father about them. It is a sore subject."

"What has happened to the hunters?" I asked, wonderingly. "Are they dead?"

"No; they are sold."

CHAPTER VII.

FROM that time forth began a new era for me. Very shortly after the incident I have spoken of in the last chapter I was removed from Mrs. Lane's and returned to Water-Eardley. I was then between eighteen and nineteen. I am inclined to believe that I was more

childish in some respects, and much less so in others, than most girls of my age. The sort of foretaste of the world—the preliminary experience of its buffets and struggles, its victories and defeats, which is supplied to a child by the competition of brothers and sisters, I had never had. Even my school life had not altogether stood in the stead of it. But, on the other hand, I had escaped the most imminent danger that usually threatens an only child: I had never been “spoiled.” But for this blessing I have to thank my grandfather’s firmness and wisdom. I had been accustomed to appeal to him and to lean on him with absolute trust throughout my young life; and he now stood by me with counsel and help when I had to face a new aspect of things, and to learn some lessons which only a practical contact with the difficulties of existence can teach.

My father was sorely pressed for money. I had known that it must be so, when I heard that he had sold his hunters: the beautiful, docile creatures in whom he had taken such pride. And this, too, painfully explained why there were such long arrears of payment to be made for my schooling. But of what had caused my father’s need I had no conception. Grandfather forbore to tell me. But poor mother, in her distress and her yearning to confide in a loving heart, soon revealed to me that my father had of late been involving himself deeply in what are called “turf speculations.” In plain terms, he had been betting and gambling and losing, not recklessly—he was but too deeply plunged in anxiety as to the result of the risk he was running—but infatuatedly. It would be more correct to say that mother’s face and voice infected me with apprehension and grief, than that my intelligence fully realized all that was implied in the word “gambler.”

“Then, mother dear,” said I, attempting to apply what little lore of life I had gleaned from story-books to the present case, “I suppose we are ruined?”

It appeared, however, that we were by no means ruined. Mother even smiled at my solemn face as I said the word; but her smile was like a pale sunbeam struggling through rain clouds. No; we were not ruined. Father might even have avoided the sale of his hunters by raising money in another way; but he had resolved, mother said, to make a sacrifice which should fall on him personally, and on no one else. And was not that noble and generous? Mother bade me note what liberal atonement he had made. And, after all, father had not been so much to blame; he had been led on and on by a run of good luck. And he had been persuaded and tempted by others: wicked men who had neither pity nor principle. But perhaps this taste of misfortune was a blessing in disguise: it would show father, before it was too late, what gulfs of ruin lay hidden beneath that smiling surface of good-fellowship. He had promised, he had given his word to bet

no more. He was so good, so affectionate, so frank in acknowledging his error.

I watched mother’s face thoughtfully while she spoke. When she had finished, finding that her countenance revealed something not altogether in harmony with her words, I said, “Then why should you be so sorry and so anxious, mother darling? If father has given his word, that is enough. You need not be afraid any more; need you, mother?”

“No, my dearest. You are right. I ought to have faith in my own darling; and I have, Anne. You must not fancy that I doubt father.”

But her speech was closed by a sigh that seemed to come from the depths of her heart.

However, it seemed as if her apprehensions had in truth been excessive, for the storm cleared away, and left, as far as I could tell, no permanent disaster behind it. No comfort that we had been accustomed to enjoy in our home was absent from it. The empty stalls in the stable, and the dismissal of one of the grooms, alone reminded us that we had narrowly escaped a far greater misfortune. My old friend Dodd, for whom I had always retained a kindly feeling, left us about a year after my return home. He married, and set up in a little roadside inn about seven miles from Horsingham, which inn, from its situation in close proximity to the main highway, did a thriving business with carters and carriers, at all seasons of the year, and with stray travelers during the race-time.

Dodd was replaced at Water-Eardley by a smart, sly, undersized creature, who had been for some time employed about Lord B——’s training stable. I remember father mentioning this fact as being a great recommendation when the man was first engaged, and grandfather making him very angry by replying, “Mercy on us! The fellow comes armed with a regular diploma from the school of perdition, does he?”

But grandfather seldom permitted himself such utterances as this. He had the talent of holding his tongue. (How rare and how precious a power!) He had a sincere desire to make peace. He knew that nothing is more likely to check the struggling growth of amendment than the cold breath of distrust. He encouraged my mother—he was cordial and pleasant as ever with my father. It seemed as if all were still as it had been. But it was only seeming.

Among other changes which I observed in my father, now that I lived constantly at home, was a listless indifference to the pursuits he had formerly been interested in; his farm and his stock were merely a care and a trouble. He sold off all the beasts he had of a famous breed of cattle (more than one silver prize-cup won from county competitions glittered on the sideboard in our dining-room), and replaced them with common animals.

I could not for the life of me have told why,

but even to my inexperienced eyes the whole aspect of the farm was changed. The Germans have a homely proverb of rural life: "The master's footstep manures the field best." On our fields the master's footstep rarely fell. By degrees father entirely relinquished one farm, consisting of arable land, which he had rented, and retained only the grazing meadows. Father always had some excellent reason to give for every change that he made. He really was an enlightened farmer, and understood his business very thoroughly. This made it almost impossible for any one to remonstrate with him as to what he was doing, and what he was leaving undone. "You will allow, I suppose," father would say, sharply, "that I know something about land, and something about stock!" This being indisputable, he would add, "And I presume you will give me credit for using my knowledge to my own interest. A man will care for *that*, at all events, whatever else he cares for."

Interest! His own interest? How strange it is that men should go on repeating the parrot-like formula, whose truth is contradicted by every day's experience! There is no petty passion in the human breast but will override "interest," in the sense generally attached to that word.

Father was constantly saying that farming was such a *slow* way of making money; that what you gained one year you lost the next; and making other grumbling speeches, which—I confess it—irritated me terribly. Once my mother exclaimed, very innocently, "But, George dear, what need is there for us to 'make money' at all? Have we not enough? Heaven knows I don't long for riches!" And father was out of humor the whole day afterward. Alas! that was coming to be a frequent occurrence. Father never had sweetness of temper comparable to mother's. He was what people call "hasty." But then whosoever made that remark almost invariably added, "It was over in a minute." For my part, when I hear such a characteristic mentioned in the way of praise, I am inclined to ask, "With whom is it over in a minute? With the hasty man himself, or the object of his sudden wrath?" Wounds given in haste will often take long to heal. But, at least, in former times when father was angry, those around him usually comprehended wherefore he was so. He had been frank-natured too, and disdainful of equivocation; but he was changing, changing, changing, day by day.

I am dwelling chiefly on the internal phases through which our home life passed, so to speak. These were mostly hidden from all who were not dwellers at Water-Eardley. The superficial part of our existence was, I imagine, much the same as ever in the eyes of strangers.

My parents, perhaps, did not go from home as much as they had been used to do when I was a child. But my father had a large circle of relatives in the neighborhood, and we visited

a good deal; much more, indeed, than was agreeable to me. For, to say truth, I did not find all these tribes of second and third cousins by any means congenial to me. I had, to say the least, a distaste for their society, and I have reason to believe that the distaste was heartily reciprocated.

The few acquaintances I had made during my school-days in Horsingham I retained. Lady Bunny called upon my mother, and my mother returned her visit; and there ensued dinners at Sir Peter's house and at my father's; and a dance at the former place, on which occasion both Barbara Bunny, my late school-fellow, and I were introduced to the fashionable world of Horsingham. But this was a rare dissipation, and did not lead to much further gayety. It had the effect, however, of distracting my mind from other things for some time afterward. I found, to my surprise, that my studies were flat and savorless; that I was haunted during the writing out of an exercise by the echoes of a tuneful waltz; that my thoughts were rather frequently busied with devising imaginary costumes for myself, and fancying how I should look in a lemon-colored crape dress, such as the eldest Miss Bunny had worn, and other similar speculations. In a word, I discovered in myself a hitherto unsuspected taste for excitement, not to mention a considerable development of the organ which I believe phrenologists have designated love of approbation.

Since I had left school, I had, by grandfather's advice, and partly in consequence of a suggestion that he had made to my parents, continued certain of my studies under the auspices of the Reverend Edwin Arkwright. He was an excellent German scholar, and he gave me lessons in that language. Also he read history with me, and even imparted to me a slight smattering of Latin. Father had objected at first rather strongly to this latter study. He did not want his girl to be a blue-stocking. He hated learned women; they notoriously made bad wives and mothers. Home was a woman's sphere, and domestic duties were her proper employment. I remember in my inexperience earnestly endeavoring to discover father's reasons for thinking that the declension of *hic, hæc, hoc* would undermine my principles, and harden my manners, and utterly failing to get any enlightenment as to his views on the subject. When I had recourse to grandfather, he merely said that every one had some prejudices, and that it could not be expected that my father should be totally exempt from them; but that he (grandfather) had persuaded father to let me learn from Mr. Arkwright, assuring him that there was no apparent danger of my becoming a portent of erudition. And indeed the discerning reader, who shall peruse these pages to the end, will scarcely require me to assert that whatever evils have happened to me in the course of my life have most undoubtedly been due in no wise to excess of learning: Heaven save the mark!

"But then, grandfather," said I, earnestly, "how is it? Does father want me not to learn well from Mr. Arkwright? Does he think it won't be a bad thing if I only *pretend* to learn German and Latin, but that it will hurt me if I really do study industriously?"

Whereto grandfather only replied, dryly, that I had better not make such speeches as that to my father, as he would probably consider them unfeminine. And then he added, more seriously, "Do not question your parent's conduct in a caviling spirit, little Nancy. No Latin in the world was ever worth a loving heart and a docile temper."

I went once a week to Mr. Arkwright's house to take my lesson; and I usually spent the evening of those days at Mortlands, especially during the winter and autumn when the daylight set early. To me my lesson-days were times of almost unmixed enjoyment. At least they had been so up to the time of the dance at Sir Peter Bunny's. After that occasion, I found that the concentration of my mind upon my books was much more difficult than it had been: still I continued to go to the curate's house on the appointed days. I knew beyond the possibility of doubt that the sum paid for my lessons was an important object to the Arkwrights. It never occurred to me to question my parent's power of affording it. The example of Mrs. Lane's over-due school bill might, it may be thought, have awakened some misgivings; but I believed that the causes which had led to that circumstance had ceased forever; and that the sun was not surer to rise each morning than was the price of my lessons to be duly and regularly paid to Mr. Arkwright. I may here record that it was so paid. But not until many years later did I learn from mother's confession, that the person who paid it was my grandfather.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE Reverend Edwin Arkwright lived in a small house in the oldest part of Horsingham. The street he lived in was narrow and winding: it was called Wood Street, and was perhaps the dullest in the whole town—though that is a bold word. The houses in Wood Street varied considerably in size, but they were all old houses. The Arkwrights' residence was very old. It had lozenge-shaped little panes of glass in the windows; the ceilings were traversed by massive beams. Scarcely any two of the rooms were on the same level. You went up steps and down steps, apparently for no reason but that the builder had chosen that it should be so. There were inscrutable closets hidden away in the thickness of the walls; and the deep seats in the windows lifted up by means of a hinge, and revealed lockers which always made me think of a ship. One characteristic of that house was gloom. Let the sun shine as he would out-

side, within the little low-roofed parlor darkness always fought a good fight for supremacy. It lurked in corners, and brooded overhead among the oaken rafters. And by three o'clock in the afternoon, save perhaps for a few days in the full midsummer, it had invaded the whole room. Whoso wished to use his eyes in the parlor at that hour must remain close to the beetle-browed window, or have recourse to lamp or candle. There was, indeed, one roomy closet near the fire-place which never was illumined by the light of day. Mrs. Arkwright would grope in it, and dextrously select what she wanted by means of her sense of touch, aided sometimes by that of smell. For this was a store closet, and the children were invariably set sneezing whenever they approached their young noses to its spice-laden atmosphere. Once, and once only, I saw that mysterious receptacle partially revealed by the feeble flame of a rush-light. I could not help thinking of the famous dark cavern of Kentucky as I peeped into it. White, ghastly looking jars loomed on the shelves, and seemed to *blink* when the rush-light's ray fell upon them, like creatures to whom dimness is natural. I could fancy that the drab-colored paper, in which various household stores were tied, had absolutely become paler from long residence in that atmosphere of total eclipse. And I certainly saw some agile little insects scudding hurriedly away from the unwelcome illumination.

The darkness was inherent in the structure of the house. But it had another characteristic, which was solely due to the energy of its mistress—it was inexpressibly (I had almost said insupportably) clean. There was something almost depressing in the specklessness of that house; it suggested such a chilling and unsympathizing superiority to human weakness! Poor Mrs. Arkwright, how she toiled and strove! Five children had to be fed and clothed and housed out of her husband's scanty pittance, eked out by such chance earnings as fell in his way. Five little helpless creatures were living and eating and wearing out their garments day by day; and two were dead. The father spoke of the departed ones sometimes as if their going had been in truth a blessing, though he had doubtless loved them well. But I am sure that the mother never ceased to regret those lost little claimants for food and care and tendance. Love that is shone on by sunny smiles may be a fair plant; but love that has been watered by tears is imperishable.

Mrs. Arkwright's children never squalled, her chimneys never smoked, her knives and platters were always bright and clean; and yet I fear that her husband did not always return to his hearth and home with the willingness that might have been expected from so affectionate and domestic a man as he was. In truth, there was a little familiar fiend who made a third at his board; who quenched the glow of the fire, and smirched the snowy cloth, and

dropped a bitter flavor into the food. And the name of the fiend was Jealousy.

Mrs. Arkwright was not a jealous wife in the ordinary acceptation of the term; but she was jealous of the attachment of every human being whom she cared for. She was jealous of her children, her friends, her servants. I believe she was jealous of the purring cat that rubbed its head against its master's legs. She must have been good-looking once, I fancied. She was not indeed old in years when I first knew her, but the providing of that daily bread, for which her five little ones were taught to pray, had planted many a furrow in her tawny face. She was very dark; black-browed, black-haired, black-eyed. Hers was an aspect that a foreigner would be apt to consider peculiarly un-English. But she came of a good old yeoman family, that had held the same land in our county from generation to generation for many centuries. I know not whether the familiar fiend I have spoken of had set his mark on her complexion, as well as her mind, but the truth is that she was yellow and bitter as a Seville orange.

I went to Wood Street one afternoon with my books, and arrived there too early for my lesson. This had happened before. I was driven into town by my father, and had to accommodate my hour of setting forth to his convenience; and on market days he sometimes came to Horsingham rather early. Mr. Arkwright had not yet come home, but I was ushered by the little maid-of-all-work into the parlor, and I sat down to wait. I thought at first that there was no one there; but becoming, after a minute or so, accustomed to the dimness, I perceived little Jane Arkwright, the youngest child, fastened into her wicker chair, which had served, I fancy, each of the three younger Arkwrights in succession; for things "wore" wonderfully in that household. Jane was a fair, gray-eyed creature, like her father. She was fastened, as I have said, into her chair, and a kind of ledge, forming a table, was placed in front of her. On this were ranged some dozen or so different shaped bits of wood, cut out of the soft sticks used for lighting fires, and with these she was "playing." Heaven knows what fancies her baby brain connected with those unpromising materials! But the little creature was as gravely interested as a chess-player over his game.

"Good-day, Jane," said I. Jane smiled faintly, and fixed her eyes upon me with an unwinking gaze. I kissed her, and began to talk to her in baby fashion, asking her what "those things" were; meaning thereby the bits of wood. Jane replied, with much composure, and a quiet putting aside of my nonsensical attempts to be amusing, "Bix." And then resumed her occupation of arranging and rearranging the "bricks" on the ledge of her chair.

"Ah," said Mrs. Arkwright, coming into the room shortly afterward, "you're a little early,

Miss Furness; Mr. Arkwright is not come home yet." She glanced sharply at me as I knelt near little Jane. She always professed a dislike to her children being made "soft," as she phrased it; and, consequently, discouraged a too caressing manner in those about them. But I believe that her besetting failing was at the bottom of this; and that she grudged any scintillation of regard that went forth from her children's hearts to a stranger. Fortunately, little Jane's instinct was not to be deceived by any assumed hardness of manner. She turned on her mother a very different look from that with which she had regarded me, and held out her little arms to be taken. It was curious and pathetic to see Mrs. Arkwright's face change and soften as she lifted Jane and set the child on her knee.

"How good she is!" said I. "She was all alone here when I came in, and as quiet as a wee mouse."

"She is mostly alone all the morning."

"Poor little thing!"

"Do you think it such a misfortune to be alone? I would give any thing for half an hour to myself, sometimes. But Jane will soon have to go to school with her brother and sisters."

"To school! How old is she?"

"Turned three. Oh, you needn't look so astonished. Lizzie went to school before she was so old as this one. But then Lizzie was the eldest, and I had to get her out of the way for a few hours every day, because there were *two* babies younger than herself to be looked after."

Presently Mr. Arkwright returned, and we began our lesson. Mrs. Arkwright brought in her work-basket to the parlor, and sat sewing diligently. Hers was no dainty device in delicate wicker-work, lined with satin, and fitted with silver. Mrs. Arkwright's work-basket was strong, ugly, and well-worn; and her work on the present occasion was the dextrous insertion of a patch into a pair of cloth trowsers of small dimensions, the property of Edwin Arkwright, Jun., commonly known as Teddy.

"You are absent, I think," said Mr. Arkwright, gently, after a patient explanation of the meaning of a passage in Schiller which I had entirely failed to follow. "Whither are your thoughts wandering?" he added, with a smile.

It was a question to which I did not at all contemplate giving him a true answer. My thoughts had been wandering with a light rhythmic motion to the accompaniment of a waltz tune; they had fluttered over garments of many colors, and flowers, odorless, indeed, but of cunning workmanship. Lastly, they had been contemplating an existence devoted to cleaning rooms, nursing babies, and mending trowsers, as contrasted with such constituent elements of happiness as the dancing, dresses, and adornments aforesaid, and shud-

dering in every fibre of their butterfly wings at the picture. And yet at the very same moment there was that within me which sincerely disdained the erection of selfish frivolity into an ideal of life. I suppose most persons have experienced similar contradictions.

I stammered out, "I—I beg your pardon, Mr. Arkwright. I am giving you a great deal of trouble."

He recommenced his explanation, and this time I followed it pretty well; but only by a strong exertion of will.

"I think," said Mr. Arkwright, closing the book at the end of my lesson, "that I must ask you to rewrite that translation. It is scarcely so well considered, or so carefully expressed, as usual."

There was a look of disappointment on his face which moved me greatly. I had often told myself how much to be compassionated the poor man was, and how glad I was to think that my lessons were not irksome to him, but that he took some pride and pleasure in my progress. And now—!

Mrs. Arkwright put in a word for me. Nothing made her more inclined to be merciful to any one than the perception that he or she had incurred her husband's displeasure. Not that she loved to oppose Mr. Arkwright's judgments, but that it lulled her wakeful jealousy, which the least word of praise from him was certain to irritate.

"Come, Edwin," said she, with a smile that made one wish she would smile oftener. "Don't be hard on Miss Furness. I think this is the first time that she has not done even better than you expected."

"I hope I was not very hard, Patty," said Mr. Arkwright. He was making my books into a packet, and fastening them together with a little leather strap, as he spoke. He had long, slender white hands, which looked as if they were neither strong nor dextrous, and which did not belie their appearance; for the strap slipped from his grasp, and down fell the books in various directions on to the floor.

"Oh, pray, let me do it!" I exclaimed, kneeling down to gather the scattered books. But before I could do so Mrs. Arkwright had picked them up, and had neatly and rapidly put them together in a parcel firmly fastened by the strap. "Oh, I am so much obliged to you, Mrs. Arkwright," I said. "How beautifully you have made the parcel. But I think I never saw such skillful hands as yours; they can do any thing."

"Practice makes perfect," replied Mrs. Arkwright, and checked a little sigh, as she resumed the patching of Teddy's trowsers.

"Miss Furness is quite right," said Mr. Arkwright, looking at his wife with a beaming face. "They *are* skillful hands. Dear, busy, helpful hands!" He clasped her brown fingers in his fair ones as he spoke, and for one instant, at all events, Mrs. Arkwright looked happy.

It was customary for Eliza to call for me at

Wood Street on my lesson days, and to accompany me to my grandfather's. She was waiting for me now, and we went away together. On turning from Wood Street into the main street of the town, we met Alice Kitchen coming from the market with a covered basket on her arm. She stopped to speak to us, and to exclaim—as she did every time she saw me, however short the interval might have been since our last meeting—

"Miss Anne!" Then changing the emphasis—"Miss Anne! How you do grow!"

"Do you find me much grown since last Monday, Alice?"

"Oh, but to think as I was not so old as you are when we first saw you, Miss Anne. And you such a little white-faced thing! Deary me!"

"Is your father quite well, Alice?"

"Thanks be, Miss Anne, he is nicely. We be in a bit of a worrit just now, for we're going to take a lodger this races."

"A lodger!" exclaimed Eliza. "Why, Alice Kitchen, *niver*!"

I think that Eliza conceived some peculiar solemnity of adjuration to be involved in the utterance of both Christian and surname. She always used the two when she meant to be impressive. And she meant to be impressive now. For let the reader consider that a lodger coming to Horsingham for the race-week must, in all probability, come for the purpose of attending the races. And the races and all connected with them were held in abhorrence by the sect to which Eliza and the Kitchens belonged. Their pastor—the blood-chilling preacher whose eloquence Eliza had once so singularly commended—was in the habit of planting himself under one of the great elms on the way to the course, and distributing hand-bills to all passers-by, calling upon them in exceedingly strong language, enforced by big black letters reeking from the press, to turn back while there was yet time, and flee from the yawning gulf of perdition; and, moreover, uttering other similar warnings in a loud voice. Therefore, it will be perceived that the announcement of a member of this gentleman's flock receiving a lodger during the race-week was calculated to startle and even scandalize his fellow-members.

But Alice was no whit abashed. Professing that she did not want to keep me standing in the High Street, "seeing as it was so thronged, being market-day," she turned and walked a little way with us through some by-streets, and she talked the whole time. I think that Horsingham folks—and, indeed, the natives of our county generally—have a pre-eminent gift of speech. They love—men and women, young and old—to "hold forth." The stream of words pours forth copiously, and they would rather make a long speech than a short one, upon any imaginable topic. Alice was certainly not grudgingly endowed with powers of talk. She stated her case and pleaded her cause at considerable length. Her arguments seemed to amount to this: that as it was clear people *would*

come to the races; and, as the ungodly made a profit of their doing so, she saw no reason why she also should not derive some advantage from the crowd of visitors. "'Tisn't as though father and me, saying we wouldn't let, 'ud keep folk from coming, Miss Anne!" said she. "And there'll be that throng of strangers as niver was; as butchers' meat alone 'll cost a week's wage pretty well. We've furnished the little sitting-room up stairs quite genteel. And there's Mat's room empty now, as is the best bedroom i' the house." ("Trust him for that!" thought I.) "And so we've made up our minds to set a ticket i' the window. Father he was against setting the ticket. He thought it seemed like encouraging the races. But I say, 'No; if you want to let, you must make the folk know it.' Setting the ticket won't make nor mar the races as *I* can see. So father he came round at last."

"And what does Mr. Matthew say to it?" I asked.

"Oh, Mat, he's clean against it," answered Alice, coloring a little. "He holds fast by the wages of sin being death. But then, Miss Anne, you see he's well off enough. And I'm sure, if father and me got as much out of grandfather as Mat and his wife does— Well, that can't be cured, and must be endured." With that she bade us good-day, and turned to go back, having first invited Eliza to drink tea with her any Sabbath evening after chapel that she could get leave from Dr. Hewson to do so.

When I told grandfather what Alice Kitchen had said he looked vexed, and passed his fingers through his hair until it was more like a mane than ever. But he made no comment beyond muttering to himself, "Of course, of course. The old story! The usual thing!" He liked Alice. She had become quite a favorite at Mortlands. Since her brother's marriage she had become closer friends with Eliza than ever. And even Keturah, whose good opinion was not lightly to be had, approved of Alice's industry and good-humor; and especially of a certain blunt honesty which characterized her, and which contrasted oddly with the canting form of many of her utterances.

"And so these—ahem!—blessed races are to be more numerously attended than ever this year, are they?" said grandfather, thoughtfully nodding his head.

"So Alice seemed to think, grandfather."

"H'm!" (with a peculiar grunt of discontent).

"Horsingham people are quite rejoicing at the prospect. They say a night's lodging will go up to a fabulous price."

"Ay, ay! Spoiling the Egyptians is good fun enough." Then he added, in a lower tone, "But one doesn't find it so pleasant when one's only daughter happens to have cast in her lot for better for worse with one of the tribes of Pharaoh."

"*He* will be busy gathering in a plentiful harvest," observed Mrs. Abram, mysteriously.

"Pharaoh?"

"Satan!"

"Tut, Judith! There, there, I beg your pardon for startling you. The harvest men will reap on Horsingham race-course; men have sown there; and they plant a fresh crop every year. More's the pity!"

Grandfather withdrew to his study; and no sooner had he turned his back than Mrs. Abram bent forward to me with uplifted finger, and her eyes so wide open that the odd yellow specks in them gleamed very conspicuously, and huskily murmured, in her most inarticulate tones, "Ah, love, if he would but understand! But your dear grandfather never did think enough of the devil!"

CHAPTER IX.

ALICE KITCHEN's expectations were fulfilled. The races of that autumn were more numerously attended than any meeting that had taken place for many years. I remember that autumn well. I have reason to remember it. I remember mother's hesitation as to whether she should, or should not, be present on the race-course on the great "cup" day. And I remember how at last, despite grandfather's remonstrances, she resolved to go. I knew then as well as I know now—albeit, nothing was said between us to that effect—that mother went to the races and took me there, in the hope that our presence might keep father from the betting-ring, and prevent mischief.

It was a lovely bright day. The sky was clear, save for a silver gauzy mist on the horizon, that looked like a breath on a mirror. The course, I heard it said, would be in first-rate order. The person who said so was Dodd's successor, the undersized groom. His name was Flower, and I always thought a more inappropriate appellation could scarcely have belonged to him. Flower was no favorite with my mother. She discovered, a very few weeks after his arrival, that he had introduced the practice of card-playing into our kitchen, a thing unheard of there before. He was not always quite sober, although never too drunk to do his work. His manner was full of a suppressed insolence, and his tongue was, the other servants said, versed in the vilest ribaldry, to which he would give utterance on any occasion when the presence of his superiors did not restrain him. But neither these considerations, nor any others which could be presented to him, availed with my father to induce him to discharge Flower.

"My Lucy, darling," father would say, "can you tell me that the man has ever dared to be insolent or ill-behaved to you in word or look?"

"To me? No, George; but—"

"Or to Anne?"

"Why, no dear. Still I—"

"Or to me, or to any guest or friend we

have? To be sure not! And he is a first-rate groom: quite first-rate. As to the servants' morals, they will take care of themselves. Or, if not, I am sure that neither you nor I are able to take care of them. And I wonder that you should be growing puritanical. *You*, of all people—brought up as you have been!"

This was said as we were driving to the race-course; and I pondered on it a good deal. Father had given forth many such utterances lately, and they never failed to rouse my indignation. There was an implied assumption in them that, because grandfather did not profess to be bound within the narrow limits of any of the orthodox codes of behavior known to Horsingham, therefore he and his must necessarily and consistently grant the widest license, and the most placid toleration to all evil-doers and evil-doings. The High-Church people and the Low-Church people, the Methodists and the Papists, the Zion-chapelites and the Baptists, publicly condemned each other to perdition every seven days or so; but they were quite unanimous in detesting the principles of my grandfather, who was charitable to them all, and comprehended that there were good men to be found in every one of these denominations. If he would but have anathematized any one set *en masse*—if he would even have declared his conviction that they would *all* of them be lost, instead of humbly hoping they might most of them be saved, I really believe they would more readily have forgiven him. In short, it often occurred to me then, and has often occurred to me since, that poor Mrs. Abram had summed up the public grievance against grandfather when she said that he "never did think enough of the devil."

"You'll stay with us, George, won't you?" said my mother, when our carriage was got into its place in the line, and the horses had been taken out. "I get nervous in this crowd if you leave us by ourselves," she added, with a poor pretense of there being no other reason why she wished to keep him by her side.

"Stay with you? Of course!" father answered, testily. "You don't mean, I suppose, to pin me to the skirt of your gown? I shall be on the course, and quite within hail all day."

To see a bright tear come and tremble in mother's eye, and the color flush into her face and then fade, leaving her very pale, made a feeling of burning indignation rise in my breast against father; and the feeling was not quenched by my catching sight of Flower, who had heard what had passed, and was standing with his drab-gaitered legs apart—as bowed and fleshless they looked as the "wishing-bone" of a chicken that has been picked clean—and an insolent grin on his smooth, sharp-chinned visage.

Presently, as the course began to fill, I recognized one or two acquaintances. My father's cousins (children of that aunt who lived far away from us in the country, and with whom I have mentioned my parents staying on a visit), the Cudberrys, were there—one son and three

daughters—occupying a very odd vehicle, which I well knew by sight. It was nearly square, with four seats inside and a roof supported by poles, whence depended leather curtains, which were closed when it was cold or rainy, but which now were furled back, and fastened by straps and buckles. This vehicle ("the sociable," it was called by the Cudberrys) was driven by a man in a drab-colored livery coat of enormous size. It was long and wide and heavy. The collar of it nearly smothered him. The cuffs of it were so ample that his hands were entirely concealed. The skirt of it hung over his heels. It must have been made for a man of exceptionally vast proportions. Its present wearer was rather short, with a very wide, red face—like a face reflected in the bowl of a spoon, I fancied—and red hair, surmounted by a stiff, glazed hat. Him, also, I knew; he was Aunt Cudberry's principal servant. His accomplishments were exceedingly varied, and ranged from "pitching" a load of hay to decanting a bottle of port, whenever Uncle Cudberry could make up his mind to have one opened, which was not very often. The young Cudberrys, as they were called, although Sam Cudberry, the eldest, was turned forty, and his sisters followed close upon him, made a remarkable contrast with the rustic and old-world air of their carriage and their coachman. They were dressed in extravagant imitation of those works of art on which one may feast one's eyes in the shop-windows of tailors and dress-makers. I never saw any thing alive clothed quite in that manner save the young Cudberrys, although I have many a time, when I was a child, gazed admiringly upon certain waxen effigies at the door of a clothing warehouse in the High Street, kept by a Jewish tradesman, which came near to rivaling Sam Cudberry in general effect. His sisters, too, were marvels of attire. I counted so many shades of color in Matilda Cudberry's garments within a minute or so, that I gave it up in despair of enumerating them all. The three sisters were very small and very lean, and they wore so much clothing, and that of so conspicuous a kind, that they themselves seemed lost and extinguished under it. They always gave me the idea of *inhabiting* their clothes, if I may use such an expression, rather than wearing them. They did not love me, nor my mother, nor my father, though for him they felt, I fancied, a kind of compassion. I don't know why, and I believe they did not know why, either; and my grandfather they actually detested. Nevertheless, catching sight of us, they alighted from the sociable and came toward us—Sam and Matilda and Henrietta and Clementina.

"How do, cousin? How do, Mrs. Furness? How do, Anne?" said Sam.

He had a natural, broad, country accent, which would not in itself have offended my ears, albeit they were used to a nicety of pronunciation in my mother and grandfather very rare in Horsingham. But to hear Sam Cudberry, conscious and ashamed of his tendency to talk

his native dialect—overlay it, and smother it, and change it into a mongrel speech, ugly, like every thing forced and strained, and vulgar, like every thing affected—was a trying thing. To hear him and his sisters mince and mouth their words, and to see the physical contortions of lip and jaw which attended their efforts, was a really dreadfully trying thing. At least, it was so to me. Mother was older and gentler and more tolerant than I was, and she bore it sweetly. For myself, I sometimes longed to make hideous grimaces; to roar out a word at the full pitch of my lungs; to scream with impatience, when I heard, Tilly, or Henny, or Clemmy Cudberry converse; but the worst of it was, that the more genteel and fascinating was their mood, the more did they think it necessary to twist and torture their native language. It sometimes positively became a mere mopping and mowing; and they had all loud, high-pitched voices. They were very genteel on this race-day. Sam, in particular, was of superfine gentility; and smelled of hair-oil to a degree that would have been unbearable any where but in the open air.

"Holloa!" said my father, good-humoredly shaking hands with them all round. "This is something new, is it not? I don't remember ever to have seen you at the races before."

"Oh, dear, Cousin George," replied Tilly, "we must make a beginning. I told ma, and I told pa, that our nursery days were over, and that we *must* begin to do a little like the rest of the world. Society has claims, you know."

If a stentorian peacock could be endowed with speech, I think he would speak like Tilly Cudberry. She pronounced "Oh, dear, Cousin George," "A-o-oo, de-o-ah, Cousin Jawarge." But I do not intend attempting to convey to the reader's eyes the mode of speaking with which father's cousins regaled our ears. He must imagine it for himself—if he can.

"To be sure: must move with the times, you know, as I tell the governor," observed Sam, in corroboration of his sister.

It occurred to me that the "times" (in Horsingham at least) had now been moving in the direction of the race-course for a considerable period. But I did not say any thing.

"I suppose," said my father, with an almost imperceptible embarrassment, "that you're not going over yonder, Sam, eh?"

He pointed to the Grand Stand. The betting-ring was there too, as I instantly and painfully remembered.

"What! to the ring? No, thank ye, George, my boy! No, no; S. C., junior, knows a trick worth two of that. No, no, no; not if I am aware of it. One of us is enough. The family will be well represented, eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

I felt as if I could have struck the booby, as he stood beside the carriage with his broad brassy countenance expanded into a grin at his own exquisite humor. I do not pretend that the feeling was not very wrong and very foolish on my part, and I knew it to be so then. But although, alas! my conscience is far from

clear of wrong and foolish impulses at this present writing, I had still less cool wisdom and self-command at twenty; which, my observation leads me to conclude, is not an altogether unparalleled state of things.

I suppose I looked as angry as I felt, for Henrietta observed, spitefully, "What a color you've got, Anne!" and then the three sisters giggled in chorus.

"Had you not better get into the carriage?" said my father, speaking to Tilly, Henny, and Clemmy, collectively. "It is higher, and you will see the course better than from the sociable. You can mount on the box, Sam; and, as you are not going to the Grand Stand, you can remain and look after the ladies. Mrs. Furness was just saying that she did not like to be without a gentleman in this crowd."

Shall I ever forget mother's face when he hurried away across the course, muttering something about "expecting to see a friend," and "having made an appointment!" The wistful glance with which she followed his retreating figure as he made his way through the crowd, towering above most of the men there, and the piteous efforts she made immediately afterward to look smiling and indifferent under the sharp unsympathizing eyes of the Cudberrys, are as vivid to me now as they were at that moment.

"I wonder you let George bet, Mrs. Furness," said Tilly, who generally took the lead in right of her seniority.

Mother put the observation quietly aside, and made room on the seat next herself for one of the girls. We were five women in the carriage, and though it was a roomy barouche, hired for the occasion, we were more crowded than was comfortable, owing to our cousins' voluminous skirts. I had vacated my place beside mother in favor of Clementina, who was the quietest and least fidgety of the three sisters; but Tilly turned her out of it immediately, and took it herself.

"Oh, dear, no!" she said, in her most peacock-like tones, and spreading out her gown, so as almost to overwhelm my mother, like a flood; "Miss Cudberry, if *you* please." (She frequently spoke of herself as "Miss Cudberry.") "No, no, Clemmy; it would look peculiar to see *you* in the post of honor and Miss Cudberry in the carriage."

Clementina submitted very quietly to the superior claims of "Miss Cudberry." Not that she would have allowed her elder sister to tyrannize over her; but they had made a sort of code of laws in the family—or rather the laws had grown up slowly by prescription and precedent—and, among them, the social supremacy of Matilda was a leading article. It was odd to me to observe how undoubtingly they assumed that these rules and regulations were as well known to the outer world as within the narrow limits of their family circle, and with what surprise and resentment they regarded any breach of them by unconscious

strangers. They had lived in a very secluded house, and in a very secluded manner, until quite recently; and being the principal persons in their own village, were not prepared to find their greatness unrecognized elsewhere. I fear that I was partly responsible for the infliction on Horsingham society of the three Misses Cudberry; for from the date of the dancing-party at Sir Peter Bunny's, of which I have slightly made mention, they made high resolve to participate in similar gayeties, and pursued their object with very frightful energy. "It seems so ridiculous, you know," said Henny, who was perhaps the most spiteful, although not the most demonstrative of the three sisters, "so truly incongruous, that *you*, little Anne Furness, as we were calling you only the other day, should visit people we have never been introduced to! And go to a ball, too! We laughed so at home when we heard it."

I had been brought up in great reverence for the laws of hospitality; and I felt that, so far as such considerations were concerned, my father's carriage was the same as my father's house, and I therefore refrained from uttering a sharp retort that rose to my tongue. But if the reader supposes that I felt otherwise than indignant and contemptuous toward my cousin, he gives me credit for more gentleness and amiability than I ever possessed.

Meanwhile Tilly was talking at the full pitch of her voice to Flower, who stood at the carriage-door eyeing her with a cool insolence, of which, I think, she was wholly unconscious.

"Flowah, Flowah! Do go and see for our sociable! I can't think where it is! Our sociable, you know. Mr. Cudberry's sociable, of Woolling. We came with our man-servant. Our man-servant is called Daniel. Tell him to draw the sociable up in line with the other carriages directly, because we shall perhaps be going back to it, and if he delays we sha'n't get a good position. And, Flowah, tell him to go next a gentleman's carriage. I will *not* be next that donkey-cart. I know it's a donkey-cart, for I saw the donkey as we passed it on the road. Daniel his name is. Mr. Cudberry's man-servant, of Woolling."

"*I* know him, miss," responded Flower. And if he had said in plain words, "I know him; he is too ridiculous an object in his livery-coat to be mistaken for any body else," he could not have conveyed more distinctly (to my apprehension, at least) that that was his real meaning.

Tilly, however, continued to utter loud directions to be given to her "man-servant" in a screaming tone, which might have been designed—as perhaps it was—to attract the attention of the whole course to the fact that Mr. Cudberry of Woolling's sociable, in charge of Mr. Cudberry of Woolling's servant, was on the ground, until her attention was seized and her speech arrested by seeing me bow to Lady Bunny, whose carriage had but newly taken its place in the rank not far from us.

"The Bunnys?" she demanded, instantly fixing her eyes on them, with no more hesitation than if they had been so many wax-work effigies, incapable of embarrassment.

"Hush!" I exclaimed, almost involuntarily. "Yes; that is Lady Bunny."

Almost as I spoke Sir Peter Bunny alighted from his carriage, and came toward us, accompanied by a gentleman. I knew the gentleman by sight. I knew his name, too. I had danced with him at the ball. He was an officer, whose regiment was quartered in a small town not far from Horsingham.

"Mrs. Furness," said Sir Peter, raising his hat, "may I have the honor of presenting to you my friend, Mr. Lacer? Ensign Gervase Lacer, of her Majesty's —th regiment of foot," added Sir Peter; and I felt unreasonably ashamed of his doing so, and wished he hadn't, and wondered if Mr. Lacer guessed why I colored—as I felt that I did.

My mother saluted the new-comers with her own sweet and unaffected grace. She remembered having had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Lacer at Sir Peter's house, she said, although he had not then been introduced to her. I could see what a favorable impression her manner and her beauty—for though paler and more anxious-looking than she used to be, she was still very beautiful—made on Mr. Lacer. And I perceived, or thought I perceived, that he was surprised as well as pleased to find me so superior in refinement to the bulk of Horsingham people. And I felt—again quite unreasonably—half vexed, half triumphant at so perceiving.

"Introduce me!" said Tilly, in a loud whisper, and nudging my mother with her elbow.

There was no help for it. "Sir Peter Bunny, I think you have met my husband's cousins?" said mother, gently. "Miss Cudberry"—"Of Woolling," prompted Tilly, parenthetically—"Miss Henrietta, and Miss Clementina Cudberry."

"Don't leave me out, Mrs. George!" called Sam, from his elevation on the box. Sir Peter and Mr. Lacer looked up, and Sam took his hat off with a flourish. Mr. Lacer's stare at him was, I felt, neither polite nor flattering; but Sam evidently conceived himself to have made a very favorable impression. The course was now becoming very crowded, and the hour fixed for the first race of the day was rapidly approaching. Sir Peter proposed to take me back with him to his wife's carriage. Barbara was there, he said, and Lady Bunny had charged him to get Mrs. Furness's permission for me to join their party. I hesitated, and looked at mother. "Go, my love," she said, "since Lady Bunny is kind enough to wish it." I took Sir Peter's arm, and went with him. Even now, when I think of it, I feel a stab of self-reproach. It was selfish, it was almost cruel, to leave mother alone with those hard, uncongenial women, to bear and conceal a thousand anxious thoughts about my father as best she could. Mother—God bless her!—forgave

me then and there. Nay, I believe she would not have admitted there was any thing to forgive. Her maternal love demanded the sacrifice of no wish, or caprice, or self-indulgence from me. But my conscience was not to be hoodwinked, and it made me uneasy at intervals all the day.

Mr. Lacer remained for a few minutes at the carriage-door speaking to my mother. And Sir Peter and I must have been quite a long way off when we heard Tilly Cudberry's voice screeching to Mr. Lacer, with great vivacity, "Do just be kind enough to try if you can find it. Flowah has disappeared! Mrs. George, where *can* Flowah be? Inquire for Mr. Cudberry of Woolling's sociable, Mr. Lace-ah! And for our man-servant, Daniel. Mr. Cudberry's man-servant, Daniel—of Wool-ling!"

CHAPTER X.

LADY BUNNY and Barbara received me very kindly. They had a handsome roving carriage, and a great hamper full of good things to eat and drink, and it was decidedly more comfortable to be with them than squeezed up as the fifth in a barouche, of which three other occupants were the Misses Cudberry.

Lady Bunny was a handsome, portly woman, with a slow, placid manner. She wore her hair—still of a clear brown color, untouched with gray—in a row of short, loose curls all round her head. This I remember thinking very odd and incongruous when I first saw her, I being then a little girl at school. But the impression soon wore off. And in no other particular, either of manner or dress, did Lady Bunny affect juvenility. Barbara was very like her mother. She had the same large light blue eyes, the same fair complexion and dimpled chin. She, too, wore her hair in a single row of short curls, and looked altogether like a small copy of Lady Bunny; for Barbara, though plump, was short, and built on a much less massive scale than her mother.

"I would have got Sir Peter to ask Mrs. Furness to favor us, my dear, but I see she has company," said Lady Bunny. She raised a large double eye-glass to her eyes as she spoke, and contemplated my cousins with her usual deliberate quietude.

"Those are my father's cousins, Lady Bunny, the Misses Cudberry."

"Of Woolling," added Mr. Lacer, who had by this time come up to the carriage. He gave me so comical a glance as he said the words that I could not refrain from smiling.

"Ah, sure!" said Lady Bunny. "And Mr. Furness, where is he, my dear?"

"I don't know—I—I—mean, I think he is over there."

"On the Grand Stand, my dear?"

"Perhaps. I am not sure. No, Lady Bunny, he is in the betting-ring, I think."

Lady Bunny said no more. But she raised her double eye-glass again, and looked this

time at my mother. And placid as Lady Bunny's face was, I could discern some traces of trouble and compassion on it as she did so.

"I think," said Mr. Lacer, "that I have had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Furness several times." He was leaning with folded arms on the carriage-door. He was on the side next me. The others were watching the clerk of the course, as he cantered up and down, scattering the crowd, and the general confusion of "clearing the course." And I think they did not hear what Mr. Lacer was saying. Indeed, I am almost certain that they did not, for he spoke in quite a low voice.

"Where have you met father?" I asked. I, too, spoke in a low voice, I am quite unable to say why. I am very sure that it was not because I feared being overheard.

"Oh, at—several places. Does he not go to the races at W—— sometimes?" naming our county town.

"He has been once or twice, I believe."

"I have never seen Mrs. Furness with him there."

"Mother never goes to the races at W——."

"Nor you?"

"No."

"You look, Miss Furness, almost as if you—"

"As if I what?"

"As if you disapproved of races. There was quite a severe expression on your face." Mr. Lacer laughed as he said it, but not rudely—only merrily, I thought; but the subject was one on which it was impossible for me to feel merry—mother's wistful face came too vividly into my mind. Mr. Lacer watched me attentively. I did not see that he did so, for I did not look at his face, but I felt it.

"They are going up to the starting-post," said he, looking at two or three bright-colored specks that were moving gently over the course at some distance. "Will you risk a pair of gloves on the event, Miss Furness? I will give you the field against Butterfly."

"Oh no, thank you! I never bet," said I, with what seemed, I dare say, ludicrous earnestness. He must have thought me the most unsophisticated of provincial school-girls, or the most affected. Mr. Lacer bowed and smiled, and then, as the race was just about to begin, he mounted on to the box, where Sir Peter was already seated.

This first race was by no means one of the important events of the day. When it was over the crowd poured over the course again, and the itinerant jugglers, mountebanks, musicians, and fortune-tellers began to ply their respective trades. I looked out anxiously over the moving mass of heads to try whether I could descry my father. I hoped that, now the race was over, he would rejoin mother. I knew how she would be longing to have him by her side again, away from that surging, roaring, horrible mass of men in the betting-ring. To me there seemed something infernal in their vehemence and excitement. Pleasure or amuse-

ment there was none within that inclosure: merely a hideous, reckless lust of money, that sparkled in their eyes, and flushed their eager faces, and gave a loud, brassy tone to their shouting voices. It was a pitiable and degrading spectacle, I thought, to see these human creatures selling their very souls on the hazard of Blue Jacket or Red Jacket, following every bound of the panting, straining horses with wolfish eyes, and saluting the victor with almost wolfish howls. It shocked and revolted me to know that my father was among this crew. And the bitter knowledge I had of mother's pain of mind did not dispose me to look leniently upon the scene. True, father had promised not to bet; but, alas! it was some time since I had felt that no reliance was to be placed on his word in that respect. Mother felt it, too: she had ceased to boast of her implicit trust in her husband's promise. In her love and fidelity to him—poor mother! *how* loving and how faithful a heart hers was—she forbore to utter a syllable of complaint even to me; but the subject of father's promise, and father's stanch adherence to his plighted word, was, by a tacit and instinctive understanding, entirely avoided between us.

Lady Bunny observed my wandering gaze. "Are you looking for any one, my dear?" she asked.

"I thought that perhaps father might be going back to our carriage now."

"Do you want Mr. Furness?" said Mr. Lacer, jumping down from the box. "Let me go and look for him: may I? I know him very well by sight."

"Oh, it isn't for myself, but I know mother will be—" I began, and then I stopped short, confusedly. He did not seem to notice my confusion; but I knew beyond doubt that he had noticed it, and that he instantly began laughing and talking with the others, in order that they might not observe my flushed face, and eyes in which tears were painfully brimming up, and only kept from falling by a strong effort, and I felt very grateful to him. Lady Bunny and Sir Peter were busily superintending the unpacking of a huge hamper. Barbara was exchanging nods and smiles with some friends on the opposite side of the course; but even if their attention had not been thus occupied, it would speedily have been distracted from me, even supposing they had been interested in observing my tell-tale face before, which was not likely, by the arrival of Tilly Cudberry, who advanced to the carriage-door with her peculiar, jerky little walk, leaning on her brother's arm. It was impossible for any being, unless it were a person afflicted (or blessed!) with total deafness, to ignore Tilly Cudberry's presence for many seconds.

"You abominable creature!" she exclaimed, shaking her finger at Mr. Lacer. The words were intended to be playful, but the voice in which they were uttered was so alarmingly suggestive of the peculiar tone of badinage known

generically as "Billingsgate," that Sir Peter Bunny and his wife looked up from the hamper quite scared, and their servant very nearly let fall a bottle of Champagne which he was in the act of unwiring.

"Meaning me, Miss Cudberry?" said Lacer, with a comical face of dismay.

"Oh, I dare say, you faithless wretch, you! It's no use putting on that innocent look—not one bit of use! Didn't you say you were going to find the sociable, and Daniel, our man-servant? And then you disappear like I don't know what, and leave us in despair! Perfect despair!"

I shall never forget the screech with which she uttered the last word. It rings in my ears, when I think of it, to this day.

Lady Bunny appeared quite bewildered. As to Barbara, she was choking herself with her pocket-handkerchief in order to prevent an explosion of laughter.

"Dear, dear, what is the matter?" said Lady Bunny, in a mildly reproving tone. Mr. Lacer explained that he had endeavored to find the "sociable" and the "man-servant," but had failed. He added that he would take the present opportunity of the interval between two races to make further search for them. Just as he was moving away he said to me, very quietly, "I shall tell Mr. Furness that your mother is without a cavalier, and get him to come back to the carriage. He evidently did not suppose that Mr. Cudberry would desert her as he has done." I thanked him by a silent gesture of the head. I admired his quickness, his self-possession, his good-natured consideration for mother. I had seen so little of the world that Mr. Lacer, with his easy, self-assured manner, which was not to be ruffled even by Tilly Cudberry, seemed to me a very superior being—one to be relied on, and believed in implicitly. Had he been loud, or coarse, or obtrusively complimentary, I should have shrunk from him with my old dainty shyness. But he was really kind, and full of tact, and he had already established, I scarcely knew how, a sort of confidential understanding with me on the subject of my father's besetting sin; and yet we had said no word to each other save such as I have laid before the reader. Still, my faith in Mr. Lacer's *savoir-faire*, great as it was, scarcely led me to hope that he would succeed in bringing father away from the neighborhood of the Grand Stand. I was, therefore, agreeably surprised to see him presently emerge from a knot of people gathered round a conjuror, and walk toward our carriage arm in arm with my father. I kept my eyes fixed on mother's figure, and although I could not, at that distance, discern her face distinctly, I saw the little joyful start of surprise she gave when father, whom she, sitting with her head turned toward the opposite direction, had not perceived approaching, touched her hand to attract her attention. And my heart was filled with tenderness and compassion for her as I saw it.

Meanwhile Miss Cudberry and Mr. Sam Cudberry had made acquaintance with Lady Bunny and Barbara, and were conversing with them after their own engaging fashion. Lady Bunny was the most hospitable creature in the world; and, although I could plainly see that these cousins of ours excited wonder and alarm in her breast, she could not allow them to stand by while the contents of the hamper were being consumed without inviting them to take a seat in her carriage and a share of the good things. The place in the carriage Tilly accepted with alacrity, and she did justice to the solid viands. But on being offered a glass of Champagne she protested, with a cry like that of a huntsman giving the view-hallo, that she never touched wine—nevah! and, not content with simply declining, she made a face expressive of the utmost disgust, as though these troublesome people were endeavoring to thrust upon her something unspeakably nauseous. Whereat Lady Bunny's large blue eyes grew larger than ever.

Sam, however, was not under any such restraint as his sister, and he drank so much wine, and became so convivial, that I was quite miserable, dreading lest he should disgrace himself beyond forgiveness.

"Well, little missy!" said my cousin Tilly, playfully waving the leg-bone of a chicken at me previous to depositing it, cleanly picked, on her plate, "and how do *you* get on? We were so amused, Lady Bunny, to hear of Anne's being at a ball at your house!"

"Were you?" said Lady Bunny, simply. "Dear! Why?"

"Oh, my goodness, I don't know! But there is an absurdity in the idea to *us*, which I dare say you can hardly understand. Gracious!" Here followed a wild peal of laughter, in which nobody joined, for the excellent reason that none of us had a conception what had excited it. Presently she proceeded: "But Anne always was the funniest little frump of a thing. Little Frumpy we used to call her at home. We are dreadful quizes, you must know, Lady Bunny. It's quite a family trait." No one responding to this sally either, Tilly looked once more at me, and exclaiming, "Oh, you queer little creature!" went off into a fit of laughter behind her pocket-handkerchief.

Barbara Bunny here lost patience and blurted out, with school-girl abruptness, "Little! Why, Anne's quite tall: she's a head and shoulders taller than *you*, at any rate!"

Tilly changed the subject. "What a nice creature that Mr. Lacer is!" she said. "Such a military figure! He was quite delighted to make our acquaintance."

"Was he?" began Sir Peter, and then stopped and altered his phrase into "No doubt he was!"

"Oh, delighted! Woolling—our place is at Woolling—in fact, we are *of* Woolling: Cudberrys, of Woolling—is only five miles from where his regiment is stationed. You may fancy how he jumped at it when I said I was

sure Pa and Ma would be glad to see him, and that there would a knife and fork for him any time he liked to call. Because, as to society, gracious, Lady Bunny, I suppose there's *nothing* but tradesmen's families where he is quartered?"

Poor Lady Bunny colored a little, but quite coincided in Miss Cudberry's opinion, that association with "tradesmen's families" was not to be thought of. She was a good woman, and in most things a perfectly sincere one; but on the point of gentility she was weak. Sir Peter professed himself even more shocked and sympathetic for Mr. Lacer's forlorn position in being quartered amidst such abomination of desolation as was involved in having tradesmen's families for his sole society. And yet Sir Peter, who was an honest, well-principled man in the main, had stood behind a grocer's counter with linen sleeves on, in his father's shop, before he took to selling malt instead of sugar, and so made his fortune. These anomalies perplexed and vexed me greatly in those days.

Sam broke in with enthusiastic praises of "Lacer." Lacer was a top-sawyer; Lacer knew a thing or two; Lacer and he, he foresaw, would become great chums. He was more than half tipsy by this time, and was becoming so thoroughly odious, with his natural stupid coarseness peeping through the thin varnish of vulgar finery with which he had overlaid it, that even his sister began to think it possible that the Bunnys might have too much of him if he remained longer. Of herself she never conceived that any society could have too much. She therefore declared that she must return to her cousin George, and send Sam to find the sociable and Daniel; for it was getting late, and they should only remain for one more race, *the great race*. And with many voluble and vociferous adieus to the Bunnys, and holding out the encouraging hope that it would not be long before she paid them a visit, she seized her brother's arm and dragged him off.

"Your cousin's very—lively," observed Lady Bunny to me; "but a little—ahem!—a little sharp in her manners, isn't she?"

"I think she is very rude, Lady Bunny," said I, bluntly.

"Oh, come, come, come!" said Sir Peter, smiling, "don't be severe, Miss Anne; don't be severe." Then turning to his wife, he added, "A good old family, my lady. A well-known name. Cudberrys, of Woolling, have been on their own land from father to son for two centuries and a half."

I saw no more of Mr. Lacer that day until just as we were about to leave the course. I had observed, with almost as much surprise as thankfulness, that father remained in the carriage with mother during the rest of the day; and I therefore was prepared for the beaming face with which my darling mother greeted me when Sir Peter escorted me back to her. Mr. Lacer came up to say "good-by" as we were driving off.

"See you to-morrow, Lacer," said my father, so familiarly that I stared at him. But the other took it quite as a matter of course, and merely nodded.

"I didn't know, George dear," said mother, "that you had invited Mr. Lacer to Water-Eardley for to-morrow."

"No, I have not done so. I shall see him in—in Horsingham. All right, Flower, go on."

I noticed with much indignation that Flower, in touching his hat to Mr. Lacer as we drove away, bestowed on him a broad grin and a grimace that was almost like a wink. But I concluded that he had been drinking. The last sound which saluted our ears as our wheels left the turf of the race-course for the road, and which rose above all the mingled din of the crowd, was Tilly Cudberry's voice, screaming, "Do be so good as look for a sociable! Mr. Cudberry's sociable, of Woolling! And for a man-servant, answering to the name of Daniel" (as if he had been a dog), "Mr. Cudberry's man-servant, of Woolling!"

CHAPTER XI.

A WEEK or so after that race-day I was sitting engaged with some studies for Mr. Arkwright in mother's little morning-room, when the door was opened, after a preliminary tap—a loud and aggressive kind of tap, which seemed not so much to ask admission as to demand it peremptorily—and Mrs. Matthew Kitchen walked into my presence. I do not think she had been to Water-Eardley more than twice since her marriage; and on each occasion she had come with a broad hint that she expected a present. The first time was when she announced to my mother that she was getting her baby-clothes ready, as she expected to be confined within a short time. That announcement induced mother to give her a handsome hood and a piece of fine linen. On the occasion of her second visit, Mrs. Kitchen brought her baby, and informed us that it was just going to be baptized in Zion Chapel, and that old Mr. Green, the child's great-grandfather, had behaved "very handsome" in the way of gifts to the infant. Father was present when this was said, and I saw him wrap a sovereign in a piece of paper and slip it into Mrs. Kitchen's hand, begging her to buy the little one some trifle with it. I had nothing to give; but if I had been mistress of a whole silversmith's shop full of christening gifts, I would not have bestowed one of them on Selina. I felt as if it would be a piece of hypocrisy on my part to do so, there being no emotion of kindness toward her in my heart.

"How do you do, Selina?" I said, looking up from my books in some surprise as she entered.

"I am very well and hearty—I'm thankful to the Lord," she answered.

And indeed she looked strong and thriving. She was buxom and bright-eyed as ever, but her countenance seemed to me to have grown harder without looking older. She had very handsome clothes on, and wore a gold watch fastened outside her waist-belt.

"It is a long time since we have seen any thing of you," said I, rather at a loss for conversation.

Selina seated herself in an arm-chair uninvited, and folded her hands on her lap before making answer. "Ah, so it is. I'm a busy woman. I have duties. My husband he is a busy man, and he expects me to do likeways."

"I suppose so. Every body has duties."

"Now, Miss Anne, don't you go to take offense because I spoke of my duties. You always was apt to take offense from a little thing. How's your mother?"

I explained to her that mother was not very well—was suffering from a nervous headache, and could not be disturbed. She received this news very coolly, having lost none of her old insensibility to other people's troubles, and then began to inquire for father, and grandfather, and Eliza, and Keturah, and, lastly, for Mrs. Abram. They were all well, I said shortly. Upon this she commenced favoring me with a kind of homily upon the "lukewarmness" of my family in general, and my grandfather in particular. She herself, she averred, had been "lukewarm" in former days—when she lived in a "lukewarm" family, in fact. And she delicately implied that, had she been prematurely cut off in that tepid condition, she considered that the guilt of it should in justice have been laid at our door. But now, Providence having specially interfered to "snatch her"—these were her words—she was happy to state that she was quite comfortable as to the future prospects of herself, her husband, and her little boy. Respecting the insignificant remainder of the human race, she confessed that she was *not* quite comfortable. Long before she was half-way through this discourse, I had signified to her that I was occupied, that I had some studies to prepare for the next day, and that if she had nothing to say but in that offensive strain, I should take leave to busy myself with my own concerns, and withdraw my attention from her altogether. But this made no difference to Selina. She talked on, and I sat with my eyes fixed on my book, but totally unable to fix my mind there too. I was burning with indignation, and I could not choose but hear the woman's ignorant folly, strongly spiced with malice. Why should she feel maliciously toward me and mine? I asked myself. She owed us nothing but gratitude. As the word shaped itself in my thoughts, it recalled to me Keturah's stern saying, that Mat Kitchen's "natural man" was a man that hated to be grateful. To any cool auditor—which I was far from being—I doubt not that Selina's tirade would have appeared exquisitely ludicrous. She had caught up certain phrases from the

Zion Chapel preacher, and certain phrases from her husband, and jumbled them all together with her own peculiar modes of speech. The incongruity between the fire and fury of some of these sayings, and the stolid calm with which Selina brought them out, was extraordinary.

When she had tired herself with talking, or when, more probably, she thought that for other reasons of her own it was time to bring her visit to an end, she ostentatiously turned her gold watch-face outward, and declared that she must be thinking of going. The efforts she made to see the face of the watch, and the difficulty she had in doing so, in consequence of the watch being securely fastened to her belt by means of a great gold hook, reminded me of my own old struggles with my pocket-handkerchief.

"Will you not have something to eat, Selina, before going back?" said I.

"Yes, I will," she answered, promptly. "I'll take a glass of beer and a bit of cold meat, or whatever they've got in the kitchen."

I rang the bell and gave the necessary orders. Before Selina left the room she held out her hand to me.

"No, thank you, Selina," said I, "I don't feel inclined to shake hands with you."

"Now that's your pride, you see," she retorted, shaking her head. She did not frown, or flush, or show the least discomposure. "You always was proud, from quite a little thing."

"It is not pride that makes me refuse to shake hands with you, Selina; or, at all events, it is no greater and no different kind of pride than I shall show to any of my acquaintance under similar circumstances. I think that you had no right to come here and speak to me as you have done. I think you did not mean what you said kindly, and I resent that."

"Ah!" said she, still perfectly unruffled, "that's the carnal nature, that is. You can't bear to hear the truth, you know. I ain't offended with you, Miss Anne; nor my husband won't be offended when I tell him. I might ha' been the same if Providence hadn't snatched me, only as I never had your temper, nor your pride, nor your height. You always was short-tempered, and proud, and high from a child. Remember me to your mother, will you?"

And with that Mrs. Matthew Kitchen rustled out of the room. I sat gazing at my book for some time after she had made her exit; I do not know for how long, but it seemed a long time; and I woke up suddenly to the consciousness that I had not understood one syllable of what my eyes had been resting on. I rose and put away my books and papers, intending to return to them later in the day, and went out into the garden. From the garden I wandered on into the river-side meadows, and walked as far as the present confines of our land. Then I turned, and was strolling slowly back toward the house, when I saw two figures emerging from the stable-yard. The stable-yard was a

part of our premises that I never visited now. I had sometimes done so in the days when Dodd reigned there. But since Flower's arrival I had never set foot within those precincts. Neither was father apt to visit his stables since the sale of his hunters. There was nothing there for him to take pride in. Nevertheless, one of the two figures emerging from the stable-yard was my father's. The other person I discerned, to my great surprise, to be that of Kitchen. Mat Kitchen, like his wife, was well clad. He wore shining new black broadcloth, and a shining new black hat. And his hair, and his whiskers, and his eyes were black and shining, to match his attire. But his pouting mouth and his short snub nose were as expressive as ever of sullen obstinacy, and contradicted the general sleekness of his aspect in a forbidding manner.

The two men did not see me at first. They were talking earnestly; or rather, my father was talking, and Matthew was listening. I heard the former say:

"I'm sure *you* could manage it for me; and as to risk—where's the risk? What risk can there possibly be? I have shown you enough to—"

Here Matthew interrupted him, saying, in his deep, growling voice, "It don't depend on me, Mr. Furness. Showing *me* and convincing *me* ain't the question. Grandfather Green is a close man. A religious man and a godly man he is, but close, Mr. Furness. Nor he ain't soft, ain't my grandfather. He looks after his percentage, Mr. Furness, in a way that at his years is surprising. And as to security—I never knew Grandfather Green wrong with his security. Sometimes it comes over me like as though it might be a special providence in his favor. For you do see the unescutest done in spite of all their worldly cunning, Mr. Furness. But Grandfather Green he has the wisdom of the serpent along with the guilelessness of the dove—in a script'ral sense—and I never knew him done yet, Mr. Furness."

At this point Mat Kitchen became aware of me, and, breaking off his speech to my father, said, "Good-day to you, miss," in the same sullen, growling way that he had been talking in all along.

"Where is Mrs. Kitchen, Anne?" asked father, in an odd, flustered manner. "I thought she went in to have a chat with you while her husband and I looked at the pony-chaise. Do you think that little matter can be managed, Matthew?"

"It may be patched up for a bit," returned Matthew. But I did not believe him to be speaking of the pony-chaise.

It was all so odd and disagreeable that I drew a long breath of relief when these people took their departure. They drove away in a high old-fashioned gig, drawn by a tall, bony, ancient horse. I recognized both gig and horse as belonging to Mr. Green, the coach-maker. I had often seen the old man driving about Horsingham in it,

"How smart Selina is," said I to my father, as we stood side by side at the gate, watching the retreating vehicle jolting along the road. "I suppose her husband is prospering very much."

"Hah! yes," murmured my father, absently.

"I never was fond of Selina, father, as you know. And I think her rise in the world has made her quite unbearable."

"Eh?" said father, sharply, turning full on me.

I told him of Selina's homily, and my refusal to shake hands with her. He flushed a dark red, as he did when he was very angry. For a minute or so he did not trust himself to speak. Then he began to scold me furiously. Why had I been such a fool as to care what the woman said? Why could I not have been civil, and held my tongue? Did I know what mischief I might have done by my cursed missish airs and pride?—had done, perhaps! For who could tell how Matthew would take it? This was what I learned at Mortlands! This was my grandfather's doing! Dr. Hewson was not content with flying in the face of all—father hesitated for a word here—of all established ordinances himself, but he must get *me* talked to, and lectured, and hectored by an ignorant, brazen hussy, who was my servant the other day.

I was greatly astonished to discover that, while my father so hotly upbraided me for not having been civil and friendly to Selina, he was at the same time violently angry with her for her impudence and presumption. I bore my scolding in silence, however, and after a while father cooled down. He walked away, stopped, hesitated, and came back to me as I still stood leaning on the gate. "Look here, Anne," he said, "the best thing for you to do will be to keep out of Selina's way whenever—*if* ever—she comes here again. You can do it quietly, without being markedly rude to her. I have a reason for not wishing to offend that sulky beast, Mat Kitchen, just now. I tell you that in confidence, Anne. Do you understand?"

"Yes, father."

"Give me a kiss, and let us say no more about it." He stooped his tall form to kiss my forehead. It seemed to me then a long, long time ago since I had been so small that father's stooping had to be supplemented by my standing on tip-toe in order to reach his lips. Now he had to bend but a little way, for I inherited his straight, upright figure, and was rather above the middle height of women.

I returned to the morning-room, but not to my interrupted studies. I could not fix my mind on them. Mother was still lying in her darkened chamber, a prey to a violent nervous headache, and the only thing that care and affection could do for her in these crises was to watch that she was undisturbed, and to leave her quite alone. So there I sat by myself, looking out on the gray autumn sky and the rotting leaves, and thinking—or rather dream-

ing—sadly enough, when there arrived by the Horsingham carrier a letter for me from my grandfather. The sight of his handwriting revived my spirits like a cordial. He had been wishing to come to Water-Eardley, he said, but had been, and still was, busy with a great many fever cases among poor families in a low part of the town. However, he hoped to see me at Mortlands soon. He had had pleasant news. Donald—I remembered Donald, of course—Donald Ayrle was coming to stay with him. It was to have been a mystery and a surprise; but he, grandfather, hated mysteries and surprises. He would tell me particulars when we met.

I have mentioned that my recollection of my old play-fellow, Donald, had been fading rapidly during the latter years of my school life. It had faded still more since then. But on this mention of him, and this unexpected prospect of seeing him again, I began to rub up the magical lamp of memory, and to summon the genii of the past.

I believe I had got as far in my recollection as our joint discovery of the North Pole, when the door was opened, and the parlor-maid announced my second visitor that day,

"Mr. Lacer."

CHAPTER XII.

"I AM afraid that perhaps I disturb you, Miss Furness," said Mr. Lacer, coming into the room.

"Oh no. I was doing nothing. At least, I was—only thinking."

I was vexed with myself, as I stammered out the words, for my shy awkwardness. I had been startled, and taken by surprise. Although really, after a second's reflection, I could discern no reason why Mr. Lacer's call should be particularly surprising to me. He, at all events, was quite at his ease, and sat down, and began to chat with me in a pleasant, off-hand manner, that soon put me at my ease also. He had met father riding out at the gate, he said, as he was about to enter. Mr. Furness had been kind enough to ask him to go into the house, although he himself was unable to turn back with him, having an appointment on business with a farmer some miles in the country. He was very sorry indeed to learn that Mrs. Furness was unwell. Nervous headache! That must be a dreadfully trying disorder. He could not say that he had ever suffered from it himself; being, indeed, generally quite unconscious of his nerves! But Mrs. Furness's organization was evidently very sensitive and delicate. What a charming face she had! He begged pardon for taking the liberty of saying so, but the words were sincere. He had never seen any one who had inspired him with such admiration and respect at first sight. There was an atmosphere of grandeur about Mrs. Furness,

just as there was an atmosphere of sweetness about a bed of violets.

Mother's praises—and they really seemed to be sincerely uttered—were very delightful in my ears. I told Mr. Lacer, laughingly, that he would be sooner tired of speaking flatteries on that score than I should be of hearing them. "They are not flatteries, Miss Furness," he protested, earnestly. "They are the sober truth. Or rather, they are part of the truth. I must not say all I feel, it seems, for fear of acquiring the character of a flatterer in your opinion. It is not one I am ambitious of."

Then he spoke of my father, and said he had seen him the day after the races at Horsingham.

"Where did you see him?" said I, impulsively. My reason for asking was, that the great betting-rooms in the High Street were usually the goal of father's pilgrimages to Horsingham during the race-week, and wondered whether Mr. Lacer had frequented them also.

"At my own rooms," he answered, quietly. "At a little lodging I had for the week in an obscure street, called Burton's Gardens. One might have had apartments in Piccadilly for very little more than I paid for two cupboards in a cottage there. But you know, Miss Furness—or, perhaps, happily for you, you don't know—how insatiably rapacious a creature your thorough-bred Horsingham householder becomes at race-time. He's like some horrible animal that gorges itself to repletion at one meal, and then goes to sleep until it is hungry again. However," he added, laughing, "since the Horsingham householder only eats—in that sense—twice a year, I suppose we must pardon his greediness!"

"What is the name of the people with whom you lodged in Burton's Gardens?" I asked, struck with a sudden idea.

"Really I can't tell you! I know the number of the house: it is eighteen."

"And the name of the people is Kitchen?"

"I think— Yes; upon my word, I believe you are right!"

"Oh yes, I know those people. The daughter is called Alice, and is a fair, handsome young woman."

"Y—yes. A large, healthy, blue-eyed girl. Not precisely what I should call handsome. To me there is no beauty in woman that can compensate for the absence of refinement. But, fortunately, tastes differ."

I felt slightly confused under the gaze Mr. Lacer bent upon me as he said the words. Vanity and pride were having a conflict within me that made my cheeks glow. Vanity pronounced that a compliment to my good looks was intended. Pride shyly declared that it would run no risk of unduly appropriating admiration; and that, moreover, the admiration which preferred me to Alice Kitchen was of no overwhelmingly high kind.

"Alice is a very good girl," I said, hurriedly. Mr. Lacer did not doubt that. He thought, if he might venture to say so, that she was inclined to be a little trenchant in her manner, and a little long-winded in her conversation. But those were not characteristics peculiar to Alice; they were very general among Horsingham people of her class. Did I not think so? Not rare, indeed, among Horsingham people of any class. He knew that Dr. Hewson was not a native of the town, or he would not have made the remark. But, upon his word, he had observed so striking a difference between my mother's manner—he added, and between my manner too—and the manner of the majority of the company at Sir Peter Bunny's house, that he had made up his mind at once that we were not of their town. And this impression had been confirmed by an inquiry or two he had made. He hoped I was not offended?

"Not at all offended," I answered. "Why should I be offended? Most people in Horsingham knew that my grandfather settled here rather late in life. It is no secret."

"Mr. Furness, your father, don't count among the Horsingham folks. He is country bred. That's different," said Mr. Lacer, carelessly.

"Did you—have you known father long?" I asked. "I don't remember—I mean I never heard—"

"You never heard him mention my name?" he answered readily, finishing my broken sentence for me. "Well, that is not very surprising. I can easily conceive that Mr. Furness has more interesting topics to discuss in the bosom of his family than a chance acquaintance made on a race-course." He laughed as he said this. He laughed rather often. He had fine white teeth, and his laugh was very frank and pleasant.

"Oh," said I, musingly, "it was on a race-course that you first met father?"

"Yes, at W——. I thought I mentioned it to you. I don't habitually frequent all the race-courses in England, Miss Furness, I beg you to believe, although I fear that you will begin to think so!"

I said, impulsively, that I was glad to hear it.

"Are you? Are you really glad? I'm afraid I can't flatter myself that you quite mean what you say." He was not laughing now, but looked very earnest, almost sad. "Do you know, Miss Furness," he went on, after a few minutes' silence, "there is scarcely a human being left in the world who could be made glad or sorry by any thing I do or leave undone!"

As he seemed to wait for me to speak, I murmured (struggling hard with a rapidly increasing fit of shyness), "Is there not?"

"No. It makes a fellow very forlorn, or very reckless, or both together, to feel that whether he goes full-tilt to the deuce or not matters to nobody."

"It matters to himself, does it not?" I stammered.

"Oh, to himself! Well—to himself. A fellow can't live for himself alone. At least, I can't. I lost my mother years ago, when I was a little chap; so little, that they lifted me up to kiss her in her coffin. I have neither brother, nor sister, nor uncle, nor aunt, nor cousin. My father is living; but he married again, a few years ago, a grasping, hard woman who— But I beg you a thousand pardons, Miss Furness! I am prosing on about myself in the most unwarrantable manner. You listen so kindly and gently that I was led on to say what I had not the least right in the world to trouble you with. And I, who have been accusing the good people of Horsingham of being long-winded and tedious! I hope you will forgive me, I do indeed."

I told him there was no need of forgiveness, and shook hands with him as he rose to go away.

"I forgot to mention that I saw your cousins the other day, Miss Furness," said he. The same amused and half-repressed smile stole over his face that I remembered to have seen there when he had been honored by Miss Tilly's playful reproaches on the race-course.

"Oh!" said I.

"Yes; I went to their house to luncheon on Wednesday last. Mr. Sam Cudberry came to fetch me, and I couldn't get out of it; I—I mean he was so very cordial and pressing, that it was impossible to refuse."

"Oh!" said I again.

"I suppose I shall have the pleasure of seeing you at Woolling before long?"

"Seeing me there? I can not tell. We don't go there very often. It is rather a long drive for mother, now the weather is getting chilly and the days short."

"Oh! but you'll be at the ball, won't you?"

"Eh?"

"The ball. Miss Cudberry told me they were going to give a ball. I thought you must have known of it."

"I suppose we shall be told in due time. I had heard nothing of it."

"May I ask you to express to Mrs. Furness how sorry I am to hear of her indisposition? If you will allow me, I will pass out by the garden—that way, is it not?—for I left my horse in charge of a servant, and—"

"You are riding, then? Mr. Lacer, I am afraid it is possible that Flower, our groom, was impertinently familiar in his manner to you the other day. I hope you will check him severely if he should repeat the offense. He is apt to be forward. I believe—my father says, that he is an efficient servant, and understands his duties. But I know father would be very angry if he thought the man failed in respect to any of our guests."

"Oh, don't think any more about it, Miss Furness. I remember he was rather free-and-easy the other day, but I suppose he had been

a little too convivial. The fact is, I have no doubt the man recognized me as an old acquaintance. I knew—that is, I was slightly acquainted with a person in whose service he was. I have a good memory for faces, and his was familiar to me directly I saw it. I assure you he was perfectly well-behaved when he took my horse just now."

Mr. Lacer made his adieu, and went his way. When he was gone I was less able to fix my mind on my books than ever. "Oh dear, oh dear!" I said to myself, pushing a volume away from me impatiently, "what has come to me? The words might be Egyptian hieroglyphics for all the meaning they convey to my mind!"

I gave up trying to study, and abandoned myself to a reverie. The day seemed to have been crowded with incidents. The visit of Matthew and Selina Kitchen, grandfather's news about Donald, Mr. Lacer's call, and all that he had said, furnished abundant subjects to think upon. The relative importance of the day's occurrences could not be doubtful; yet my girlish brain by no means busied itself chiefly with the chief of them. What does the reader think was the most tangible subject of my musings? (for there was an airy crowd of fancies fluttering hither and thither in my mind, melting and changing like April clouds, and to which I did not consciously give a local habitation or a name). It was the forthcoming ball at Woolling! A ball at Uncle Cudberry's! The thing was marvelous—unprecedented! Tilly, Henny, and Clemmy must intend to "move with the times," and inflict themselves on society in fell earnest. How they had induced their father to consent to the necessary expenditure was a matter for wondering speculation.

And what does the reader guess was the next topic on which my thoughts were intent? I am minded to be quite candid, and to that end I must confess that it was an entirely selfish one. Amidst all the hopes and fears, the dimly presaged troubles, and the present anxieties that pressed around myself and those whom I loved, my fancy lightly turned to picturing what dress I should, could, or might wear if I went to the aforesaid ball at Woolling. Debating if it were more advisable to beg for pale rose-color or pure white, and wondering whether mother would let me wear a flower in my hair.

Suddenly, as I pushed a lock of hair off my forehead, in the full glow of imagining how I should look with a spray of scarlet geranium fixed above one ear, a subtle association of ideas which I can not follow out—nor could I then—brought vividly before my mind's eye the tiny figure of little Jane Arkwright in her chair, playing with the uncouth dice of rough firewood. And that tiny figure conjured up in an instant all the poverty and dreariness and toils and troubles of that struggling household. I had often asked myself in my impulsive sympathy, was there nothing I could do to lighten Mrs. Arkwright's load of care, or cheer her hus-

band's anxious spirit? There was one way, and, as far as I knew, one only, in which I might show good-will, and make a portion of the good man's labors pleasant to him—I might do my tasks earnestly and zealously, and gratify him by my improvement. And this one simple thing I was neglecting, in order to dream of tricking myself out in finery, and enjoying myself in the company of hard, frivolous people, whom at bottom I neither loved nor respected. I hung my head as though I were abashed by some bodily presence in the room; and the tears welled up into my eyes as I thought of Mrs. Arkwright's toilsome life, and of Mrs. Arkwright's shabby little children, of whom the younger had neither petting nor playthings, and the elder were precociously thoughtful and grave, and full of careful responsibilities about the preservation of their worn little frocks and their patched little shoes.

I opened my books again, and sat down to work resolutely. At first it was difficult to attend to what I was doing. But by degrees I compelled my wandering attention; and after an hour or so I had completed an exercise and a page or two of translation, into which neither white frock nor adornment of scarlet blossoms had intruded; and if any thing else—any one else, I mean—did flit across the page, it was not—or I honestly persuaded myself that it was not—in connection with my exclusively selfish fancies.

CHAPTER XIII.

"AND so," said my grandfather, finishing a recital brief indeed, but longer than he was in the habit of making his speeches, "Donald rejects the army as a profession altogether. He says 'tis a bad trade when business is brisk in it, and a worse to be idle in."

"Yet his father is a soldier," said I.

"A good one: that I must take on trust. I *know* him to be a good man; but he would be neither if he followed his calling with an inward conviction of its worthlessness. That is a canker that rots every thing, beginning at the very core. Donald being left entirely free to choose his profession, chooses medicine."

"And comes to you to learn it? He could not do better, grandfather."

"He might do worse, perhaps. But we shall see, little Nancy, we shall see."

Grandfather had never relinquished my old pet name of "little Nancy," though I had long outgrown it in a literal sense. He told me further, that Donald Ayrlie would one day be the master of a sufficient fortune to be idle on if he so pleased; his father being a careful, steady, hard-working officer, whose long career in India had enabled him to amass an independence, which there was only Donald to inherit. But Donald, naturally and properly, said grandfather, desired to qualify himself to do some work in the world. The prospect of lounging through life on the strength of his

expectations was not an alluring prospect to him. His father might live thirty years (and if the lad's wishes could keep him alive, he would never die); or he might chuck his money into the maelstrom of speculation, though that was not likely; or he might take it into his head to marry again. In short, there was no fortune so desirable for a young man as the knowledge of something serviceable to his fellow-creatures, and the industry and good-will to apply it.

Thus my grandfather. He was in a glow of pleased expectation about Donald's coming; I had not seen him so bright and cheerful for a long time, not that he was gloomy or ill-humored ever. But latterly there had been a set stern thoughtfulness on his brow, and he was very silent. I could not help connecting these symptoms with the anxious care that might be read on mother's face whenever she was neither speaking nor smiling. It had come to pass gradually; and yet, when I thought of the change in mother, it sometimes appeared to me to have been startlingly sudden. I was tempted more than once to tell grandfather of what I had heard pass between my father and Mat Kitchen. It had made me uneasy whenever I had thought of it since. But I reflected that I had no right to reveal to any one that which I had accidentally overheard; and that, moreover, father had seemed to demand that I should be discreet and silent on the subject by the words he had said, "I tell you this in confidence, Anne"—so I held my tongue.

I was staying at Mortlands for the day and the night. I had been to Mr. Arkwright's, and had got through my lessons with credit. And I had conceived and executed a great project, having first obtained my grandfather's permission: this was neither more nor less than inviting all Mrs. Arkwright's children to tea and a game of play that afternoon at Mortlands. It seems a simple matter enough to tell of, but it was hedged with thorny difficulties. First, there was Mrs. Arkwright's constitutional objection to, and fear of, her children "taking to" strangers too much; then there was the obstacle of their clothes being "too shabby for a company;" then there was the apprehension that cakes and sweets, and so on, would have the effect of spoiling them for their home fare. And, lastly, there was the difficulty of inducing Mrs. Arkwright to believe my solemn assurances that the little ones should be sent home by nine o'clock, in order that they might be up in time for school the next morning. But Mr. Arkwright and I together, aided by a powerful though unacknowledged ally—the strong desire in Mrs. Arkwright's maternal breast to give her children what gratification she could in their somewhat hard young lives—fought and conquered. They should all come, Lizzie and Martha and Mary and Teddy, and my particular friend Jane. Eliza was to be sent for them at three o'clock in a fly, and they were to return in the same conveyance, and under the

same escort, in the evening. Grandfather made only one condition on the occasion: "When you give an entertainment of this nature, Miss Furness," said he, gravely, "I think, perhaps, to call it a rout would more properly characterize it than any other title; all I ask is, that you don't expect me to be present. There is the garden; there is the big dining-room; there is Keturah with unlimited flour and butter and jam; and, in brief, every material for biliousness that the most tender lover of childhood could desire to bestow on it, and orders to deal them out royally. You won't grudge me a little peace in the retirement of my study after dinner; and you won't feel hurt if I ask for my tea there also, instead of joining the festive throng in the dining-room."

I laughed, and kissed him, and said, I was so grateful to him for letting the children come, that I would not tease him. But I added that I thought they would like to see him, if only for five minutes.

"Pooh! stuff and nonsense, little Nancy. I should bother them. Their only association with me is an empty spoon holding their poor little jaws open; and a full spoon containing 'nasty physic' to follow!"

He had in fact attended the curate's children for a throat disorder that had broken out among them; and had, I need scarcely add, steadily refused to accept any payment for so doing.

Mrs. Abram was, I was sorry to find, somewhat flustered by the prospect of the threatened inroad on the peace and privacy of Mortlands. She had become rather redder in the face, rather huskier in the voice, rather more despondent in the temper, rather more vague and wandering in the mind, rather "odder" altogether, of late years. But she was tearfully anxious to do her best for the entertainment of the small visitors. I assured her that they were the best and quietest children I knew; that they were grave and steady beyond their years; and that, so far from being riotous or overflowing with good spirits, I expected our difficulty would be to screw them up to the point of thoroughly enjoying themselves for once in a way.

"Ah!" murmured Mrs. Abram, "and then you see their father's a clergyman. That is a satisfaction; but otherwise it is dreadful when you see a lot of little innocents like them to remember that *he* is lying in wait for 'em!"

She uttered the last words in a mysterious and awe-stricken whisper, and glanced round over her shoulder in a way that was calculated to make any one who happened to be nervous or fanciful decidedly uncomfortable. However, Keturah and I between us managed to get her into a little less lugubrious frame of mind before the little ones' arrival. I confided to Keturah that Mrs. Abram was "a little low this afternoon," and Keturah immediately set about the process which she characterized as "routing her up a bit." Keturah, in right of her long and faithful service, was a privileged person at Mortlands. And she had—I think

insensibly—copied many of her master's ways and sayings. Her method of treating Mrs. Abram was in fact founded on my grandfather's.

"Come, now, Mrs. Abram," said Keturah, bustling into the dining-room, "here's Eliza putting on her bonnet to go and fetch them bairns, and nobody but me in the kitchen to get things ready. I should be ever so obliged to you if you'd tie on a apron—here's a clean white one as I've fetched a purpose—and come and measure out some sugar for me."

Mrs. Abram rose meekly to comply, but she shook her head as though it were full of the direst presages.

"Ah, dear me, Keturah," she said, with her lower jaw dropped and her mouth curved downward until it resembled that of a codfish, "I hope it mayn't be evil, all this feasting and junketing and pampering of our vile bodies!"

"Well, there's no need for you to pamper yours, you know," was Keturah's practical rejoinder. "If you think short-cake and jam puffs sinful, don't you eat none, that's all! But you know who it is as finds some mischief still for idle hands to do; and p'r'aps he finds mischief for idle heads into the bargain. My opinion is as you'll be comfortabler in your mind when you give your attention to the weighing out o' the sugar. And please be partic'lar to a pennyweight, Mrs. Abram, for in short-cake the quantities must be exact."

In due time arrived the fly full of the little Arkwrights. I could have cried to see the painful neatness of their poor attire; the speckless, threadbare, stuff frocks, the skillfully darned stockings, the little rusty boots that had been "toed," or "heeled," or "soled," as the case might be. The only means that had been unstintingly—nay, lavishly—employed for their embellishment was the application of soap and water, comb and brush. And I noticed round the fair little throat of my small friend Jane a solitary string of coral beads with a queer little gold clasp. The mother's heart could not resist decking her youngest darling with this ornament. Lizzie, the eldest child—a grave, dark-eyed little girl of ten—evidently looked on Jane's necklace as a priceless heir-loom. Her mamma had worn it when *she* was a small child, she informed me; and she kept it locked in a box. Lizzie knew there were some letters in the box. She thought they were letters written by her papa, because it was like his handwriting. She (Lizzie) hoped that Jane would be careful not to pull at the necklace, because the string might break and the beads would roll on the floor, and some of them might be lost, and *then* what should they do? But Jane was a very good child in general, and not rough or careless with her clothes.

Meanwhile this exemplary young person, aged three, was toddling along the garden path holding by the hand of Martha, the second child, and observing the flower-beds with solemn interest. It was, as I have said, late in

the autumn, and there was not much color or perfume in the garden. But the little things enjoyed it, being new and fresh to them; and Master Teddy became quite excited when I showed him the place where Robinson Crusoe's cave had been. I could not find the North Pole, nor did Teddy care very much about that. He had never before heard of De Foe's immortal fiction, so I had enough to do in giving him a slight sketch of the story, while we all wandered about the garden, and I pointed out, as well as my memory served me, the various spots in which Donald and I had enacted it together. By the time I had finished it was growing dusk, and we all went into the dining-room, where a good bright fire looked cheerful and welcoming.

As one or two of the children complained of their feet and hands being cold, I proposed a game of puss-in-the-corner to warm them before tea. We pushed the table to one side, and I sent for Eliza to take care of little Jane, while I joined the other four children in a famous romp. Little Jane was not strong or active enough to take much part in our game; but she sat on a stool beside Eliza (she declined to be taken on to the servant's knee, in a certain independent, self-sustained little way that belonged to her), and looked on attentively; occasionally forming the words, "puss, puss, puss," with her lips, but uttering no sound.

Then came tea, over which Mrs. Abram presided with great kindness, but with an expression on her countenance, when she regarded the little Arkwrights, which seemed to say, in the words of Gray, "How all unconscious of their doom the little victims play!" However, the children, *being* unconscious not only of their doom, but of Mrs. Abram's apprehensions, devoted themselves with ardor to the jam puffs and short-cake, and enjoyed themselves immensely. The entertainment was most successful. There was only one interruption to its perfect harmony, and even this was but a passing cloud. It arose from Teddy's unexpected resistance to having his pinafore tied on just before we went to table. Five clean coarse pinafores had been intrusted to Eliza's charge by Mrs. Arkwright, with strict injunctions that they were to be worn during all the time of eating and drinking; but against this humiliating precaution Teddy's manly soul rebelled. In vain Eliza and I coaxed and argued with him. Pinafores were all very well for girls, he said; pinafores were all very well for babies; he was neither a girl nor a baby; and when he was invited out to tea he begged most positively to decline donning his pinafore. But Teddy was subdued by that which had vanquished masculine resolution before his day, namely, feminine tears. Poor Lizzie began to cry, and then Martha and Mary—for no better reason than that they saw her crying—began to cry too. Little Jane did not weep, but she went through the motion of slapping with her mite of a hand, and said, "Teddy naughty,"

with judicial severity. Upon this Teddy yielded, saying, grandly, that if they were such "cry-babbies" (for which Lizzie mildly rebuked him, and observed that it was a low expression he had picked up at school) as all that, why he supposed he must let them put on the stupid old jackass of a pinafore. *He* didn't mind, then. On with it! Teddy's ruffled feelings seemed to find relief in calling his pinafore a stupid old jackass, and he repeated the epithet more than once. I whispered to Lizzie to take no notice of this little ebullition, and she dried her tears, and kissed her brother; and then Martha and Mary dried their tears, and kissed him also; and little Jane, looking on with bright, attentive eyes, pronounced, as from the bench, "Teddy dood now." And we were all very pleasant and cheerful again directly. Only Mrs. Abram murmured behind her hand to me, in a voice that fortunately was unintelligible to unaccustomed ears, "My dear Anne, did you notice? Poor little fellow! *he* had a try at him. *He* put that naughtiness into the child's mind. Of course he did. He can't bear to see 'em good and happy. I could fancy I saw him hovering around." And Mrs. Abram glanced over her shoulder again quite awfully.

After tea we made a wide semicircle round the fire, and I asked the children if they knew any games to play at. They were not much versed in games of play, poor little things, but they were very docile and willing to learn; and Lizzie informed me that Mary could "say poetry off by heart." So I begged for a specimen of Mary's accomplishments, which she accorded forthwith. Mary was the next in age to Jane, and was five years old. Next above her came Teddy, aged seven; and above him Martha, nine; and Lizzie, ten. Mary was a very fat child; different in this respect from the others, who were slight and spare. She had great black eyes, and curling dark hair, and mottled legs that overhung her little socks, and fat dimpled arms; and her very voice was fat and husky, with rich contralto tones in it; and in this voice she began with baby accents that were not yet perfectly articulate:

"Pity de so-yows of a poo-wold-man

Who t  mblin lins au' b'ought him to you door;"

repeating it all through without any stops, and taking breath in gasps whenever she happened to want it.

This performance was received with much applause. Then the children petitioned me to tell them a story. Lizzie was spokeswoman, and the others all joined in chorus. "Yes, please, *do*, Miss Furness! A story! a story!" Little Jane, who was seated on the low hassock at my feet, put up her hand to take mine; and leaning her soft little cheek against it, said, in a decisive and corroborative manner, as though to express her agreement with the public wish on this occasion, "Et—dat's yight. Oo *do*!"

So, after thinking for a minute or so, I told them I would give them a fairy story. A shout of acclamation greeted this announcement.

Then I said that I thought stories sounded prettier by fire-light than by lamp-light. This being unanimously carried also, we had the lamp taken away, the fire mended, a log being added to the coals, and then, amidst a breathless hush on the part of my small audience, and a mingled sound of crackling and seething, that sounded like a subdued and ghostly whisper, from the fire, I began.

CHAPTER XIV.

"ONCE upon a time there were two children, twin brother and sister. The boy's name was Walter, and the girl's name was Lily. Walter was a dark child, with deep brown eyes and raven hair; little Lily, on the contrary, was as fair as the flower she took her name from. Her eyes were blue, like the bits of clear sky that you see in April peeping between the clouds, and her soft hair was just the color of the down on the wing of a half-fledged chicken.

"These two children loved each other very dearly, and were always together. They lived in a village; and one of their great delights was to go down to the smith's forge at dusk, and watch the showers of sparks leap out of the blackness and melt into it again. They loved, too, to watch the dull deep glow of the red-hot iron and the intense heart of the furnace, that seemed more terrible in its quiet concentration of white implacable heat than when the roaring bellows moved it into flame; but that was beautiful though, to see the waving brightness shoot up and shake vividly upon the smoke-blackened roof and then fall again, while monstrous shadows bowed and beckoned mysteriously, to be in their turn chased away by the clear victorious flame. It was all living in their childish fancy. The sparks had life, and danced and flew enjoyingly. The great bellows labored like a chained monster. The light and shadow chased each other like elf and goblin, fairy and witch, spiritual creatures whose aims were good or evil, kind or cruel."

Here I was recalled to myself by a curious sound from Mrs. Abram. It was something like an incipient whooping-cough followed by a husky long-drawn "Ah-h-h!" and was intended—as I knew by former experience—to express a mournful and warning allusion to the direful subject on which she so much lamented my grandfather's indifference. Oddly as Mrs. Abram's inarticulate interjection sounded, I was sensible of some obligations to it in recalling me to a sense of what I was doing and for whom. For I had been giving my imagination the rein, and it had carried me somewhat beyond the children's comprehension.

"In short," said I, resuming my story, "Walter and Lily went so often to the blacksmith's forge, and watched the furnace so attentively, that they grew quite familiar with the fire,

and knew almost every look of it, whether it were dull or bright or quiet or fierce—glowing crimson like the setting sun, or flaming yellow like the great round harvest-moon; and they got to know all the different aspects of the forge. Well, now Walter liked it best when it was bright and all ablaze with light, so that you could see every nook and cranny quite plainly. Lily loved the times when the forge was dimmer, and when there were corners and hiding-places that you could fancy any thing you liked about, because the shadows lurked there and made them very mysterious. By degrees these two children, who had always been so gentle and loving to each other, began to grow quite cross and unkind. They disputed which was the best, the broad glare or the twilight glow. Walter said Lily was a little baby who loved the darkness. Lily said that Walter was very stupid to prefer being scorched by a fierce glare, instead of liking the soft shelter of the shadow when the furnace fire was low. So they disputed and argued until they both said a great deal more than they meant, each wishing to get the better of the other, rather than caring to say the exact truth, which is a sad thing to do; but then Walter and Lily were only ignorant little children. Of course, if they had been grown-up, learned men, they would not have done so."

"Wouldn't they?" said Teddy, doubtfully.

"I—I hope not. I suppose not, Teddy."

"Ah! but perhaps they might though!" rejoined that young scholar, "because I was reading in my 'Useful Knowledge' the other day that a man found out about the earth going round the sun; I forget his name. He wasn't an Englishman; and, instead of listening to what he had to tell them, they were ever so angry, because it was different to what they had believed before, and they put him in prison, and went on to him—oh, ever so cruel!"

"Naughty mans!" said Jane, who had only comprehended that some persons unknown were cruel, and that Teddy was indignant. It was quaint enough to see the contrast between Jane's Rhadamanthine sternness of condemnation and the soft helplessness of her baby body as she sat with her little tender cheek leaning against my hand.

"Well, never mind now, Teddy," exclaimed Lizzie. "*Please* go on, Miss Furness." Lizzie was drinking in the story greedily, quite untroubled by any critical objections.

"Well, and so at last the brother and sister came to quarreling outright. Instead of enjoying themselves in the fields and gardens, and delighting in the sweet smell of the flowers, and the beautiful leafy trees, and the clear river, and the soft grass, they were always wrangling and carrying their dispute about with them. If the sun shone brightly, Lily said it dazzled her, and she could not bear it. If there was a cool, shady spot under a broad, green tree, Walter pretended to shiver and shudder, and would not stay to enjoy it. In a

word, at length their quarrel grew to such a height that Lily declared she detested the day, and Walter, that he hated the night; each meaning to vex and jeer at the other. And their little hearts were full of anger and pain."

"Ah, to be sure!" murmured Mrs. Abram. "That was just the thing for him. *He* wasn't going to lose such a chance as that, you know! Not likely."

"Still Walter and Lily went nearly every evening to the forge and watched the fire, and watched the gloom, and sat on a little bench which the blacksmith had had made on purpose for them. He was a very good-natured, honest blacksmith, and very kind and gentle to dumb animals, and little children, and all weak creatures, though he was so terribly strong and tall, and though he looked very swarthy and fierce when his eyes shone in the fire-light. They sat there side by side, this little brother and sister, and spoke never a word to each other. Or, if they did say a word, it was sure to be a bitter and unkind one. But they mostly sat sulky and silent: Lily slinking back on her corner of the bench into the shadow, and Walter straining forward on *his* corner of the bench until his cheeks were scorched with the glare.

"This went on for a long time; but at length the autumn came and the days grew short, and the nights were chilly, and the children were forbidden to go to the forge any more until the spring should come again. But they begged to go once more, just for the last time, on Halloween, and this was granted to them. Now you must know that Halloween is a night when all sorts of sprites and fairies are very busy, and when they visit mortals a great deal, and join unseen in their sports and merry-makings. At least they used to do so in the old days, when there *were* sprites and fairies and goblins. They are never seen now. But the time when Walter and Lily lived was an old time, and in their days the fairies were still busy on Halloween."

"How long ago was it?" asked Martha, a pale, contemplative child, who had been very quiet and attentive.

"It was in quite another age of the world, Martha; when the world was in its childhood."

"Is that why children love fairy stories now more than grown-up people?"

"Perhaps. Very likely, Martha. Well, accordingly Walter and Lily went to the blacksmith's forge on Halloween, and sat themselves down on the bench, and stared—Walter at the red fire and Lily at the black forge, and they said never a word. Halloween was a holiday for the blacksmith. He went home and washed the blackness from his face and hands, and played and made merry with his children. And his chief workmen went away too; and there was no one left but a lame apprentice, who was told to keep the furnace fire alight, for later in the evening the blacksmith and his men were coming back to finish a job they had

in hand. But Walter and Lily sat there side by side, and stared—Walter at the red fire, and Lily at the black forge—and they said never a word. It was all very still and quiet. The lame apprentice had curled himself up in a warm corner, with his pipe in his mouth, and seemed to be going to sleep. The fire that he ought to have replenished sank lower and lower, and it grew very cold and almost dark. But still, there sat Walter and Lily staring—he at the red dying embers and she at the black forge—and they said never a word.

"All at once they became aware of the faintest sweet sound, the tiniest clear music you can imagine. It grew, scarcely louder, but clearer and clearer, plainer and plainer, and at last it ceased with one long-drawn sound, which was sweeter and richer than all the others, and which—strange to say!—seemed to come out of the throat of the great bellows; and suddenly there stood before the children two wonderful little figures not more than a span high."

"How jolly!" exclaimed Teddy, in irrepressible delight. Little Jane cried "Dolly!" in an attempt to imitate her brother; but then, hearing Lizzie whisper "Hush-sh-sh, Teddy!" she too pouted her lips, and said, "Hus-s-s-s!" and held up an absurd morsel of a warning finger with infinite solemnity.

"The two figures," I went on, "were the figures of two beautiful tiny women. It was impossible to tell whether they rose out of the embers or hovered over them, or whether they stood firmly or floated self-supported in the air. But they seemed in some mysterious way to belong to the fire, and to partake of its nature. They were very different from each other though, except in size. One of the beautiful little women was so bright and brilliant that it almost dazzled you to look at her. Her hair was like burnished gold, and her eyes like diamonds; and she wore a floating robe of the most brilliant hues, that seemed to change through all gradations of color, from the golden-purple of a pigeon's breast up to pure dazzling white. The other tiny figure was all dark. Her hair was like the deepest shades in a woodland thicket. Her eyes were of the color of a violet-hued cloud that lingers in the sky when the sun has set. Her garment, loose and flowing, like that of her companion, varied, as she moved or breathed, from sombre shades, like those upon the sea at twilight, or the dark green of a leafy forest, to midnight blackness. And yet, as the two stood close together, side by side, it seemed that each influenced the other. Sometimes the robe of the dark figure would cast a soft veil of shade over the brightness of the other. And sometimes the golden-haired figure would, as her bright draperies moved and fluttered, send little sparkles and streaks of dazzling light upon her companion. And there was a likeness in their faces, too, such as you often see between two sisters.

"Walter and Lily gazed at them in silence.

The children were afraid even to breathe, lest the beautiful tiny women should vanish. At length the bright figure spoke. Her voice was like the sound of a clear golden clarion, only very, very small. And this is what she said:

“‘Do you know our names, Walter and Lily?’

“The children did not utter a sound; but they said ‘No,’ in their thoughts, and the figure seemed to understand them, for she immediately answered:

“‘And yet you know *us*, and have seen us often, often; and under various shapes. We are fairies.’”

Here there was a movement of satisfaction among my young auditors, and Mary even kicked her fat little legs about in ecstasy.

“‘We are fairies who haunt this forge. And on this night, of all nights in the year, we are allowed to reveal ourselves to mortal eyes in our true shape. But we are only members of a vast family, some of whom are to be found scattered all over the world. My name is the Fairy Shine.’

“‘And mine, the Fairy Shadow.’ It was the dark fairy who said this, and the tone of her voice was rich and soft, as though it were breathed through a silver organ-pipe. Only it, like her sister’s, was very, very small.”

“‘We,’ proceeded the Fairy Shine, ‘are very different, but we love each other dearly. We are never far apart. One of us could not exist for long without the other. We try to make our different qualities help and serve, instead of opposing and hurting, each other.’

“Walter and Lily hung down their heads, and their hearts beat very quickly; for the fairy looked piercingly at them with her diamond eyes as she spoke, and their consciences accused them of having behaved to each other in a spirit quite different from that of the good fairies. And they moved just a little tiny bit nearer together, Lily from her end of the bench, and Walter from his.

“‘Who,’ said the Fairy Shadow, ‘is so ungrateful as to speak evil of the blessed brightness of sunbeam or fire-flame? Who forgets all the cheering warmth they shed, and all the beauty that they paint the earth with?’

“‘And who is it,’ said the Fairy Shine, ‘who rails against the soft refreshment of the shade? The kind, gentle shade, that protects the young lambs at noonday from the strong sun, and keeps the tender plants from withering, and fills the stream with pleasant showers from its dark gray clouds, and brings rest and sleep to the earth with the coming of the even-tide; to men tired with labor, and to children tired with play?’

“Walter and Lily hung their heads still lower, and drew yet a little nearer together; and the two fairies went on speaking, each in her melodious voice—that of the Fairy Shine like a tiny golden clarion, and that of the Fairy Shadow like a tiny silver organ-pipe; and each praised the good qualities of the other; and as

they spoke, the two children crept closer and closer together on their little bench. ‘And know, ye vain and ignorant mortals,’ said the Fairy Shine, raising her clear voice until it seemed to pierce and vibrate into the very hearts of the trembling children, ‘know that it is thus with all my elfin brothers and sisters who haunt this earth. They bear all sorts of various names among men, and do all sorts of various offices; but they always are set to their tasks in couples, different, like this sister and myself, but able, for that very reason, to minister the better to the different moods and needs of mortals. Some dwell around the hearth and in the chimney-corner; some tend the flower-beds, and some the unfledged birdlings; some whisper in the ears of little children, and make them laugh in merriment, or shed tears of gentleness and pity; but they all work together for good—those who bring tears quite as much as those who bring smiles; the sprite that hushes the flowers to sleep under the purple twilight, quite as much as his brother sprite who shakes the bright dew from their leaves to wake them in the rosy dawn; and the All-wise, the All-good’ (at these words both the little figures bowed themselves reverently, and over the bright form there stole a soft shadow, like a dusky mantle, and over the dark form a quivering glory, like a moted sunbeam)—‘He sends these various influences to help each other and to help the world, and there breathes through all a spirit of love—through mirth and sorrow, smiles and tears, light and darkness!’

“At these last words the faint, clear music sounded sweetly again in long-drawn chords, and the fairies vanished, the light fairy seeming to fade and be absorbed into the shadow, and the dark fairy seeming to brighten and melt into the ruby glow of the fire; and the brother and sister, who had all this time been creeping nearer, nearer, nearer, held out their arms and fell, crying and sobbing, on each other’s breasts.”

“And the good lesson was not lost on them, for they ‘lived happy ever after,’” said a deep, low voice.

“And they learned to know that Shadow has its beauty and its use as well as Shine,” added another voice, in a strong, clear, *chest-tenor* tone. And I turned round, startled from the sort of reverie into which I had allowed myself to become absorbed in the telling of my story, to see two figures, that might have been the Ecalistic nineteenth-century version of my fantastic fairy tale, standing close behind me, just outside the circle of children—grandfather, who had spoken first, with a flickering shade upon his head and face, and sober, neutral-tinted garb; and, smiling frankly, with bright, earnest blue eyes, and yellow hair, gilt by the leaping flame—Donald Ayrle.

CHAPTER XV.

I SPRANG to my feet; and all the children rose also, and faced round and stared at the new-comers.

"Why, we have 'fluttered the Volscians' with a vengeance! A couple of hawks in a dove-cot would cause nothing like the consternation we seem to have brought here!" said my grandfather. "Little Nancy, do you know who this is?"

"Mr. Ayrle," said I, somewhat stiffly. I felt shy and put out at the idea of my fantastic story having been overheard by ears it was not intended for.

"Donald," said grandfather, quickly. "Yes; you are right. It is Donald Ayrle."

We shook hands, and said "How do you do" in a meaningless kind of way. Altogether, the meeting with my old play-fellow was different from what I had thought it would be—when I had thought about it at all. Grandfather looked a little vexed and disappointed. Whether my shyness had infected Donald, or whether he had brought a store of shyness with him to be added to mine, I could not quite tell. But it is certain that we were, both of us, frigid and silent.

Grandfather seated himself, and made Donald draw a chair up in the circle; and then Mrs. Abram had to offer her greetings and bid him welcome, which she did in a dazed manner. I think that Mrs. Abram had not made allowance in her own mind for the changes which the lapse of time since she had seen Donald would be likely to make in him. His height seemed to puzzle her. Donald was not tall—being of a broad, sturdy figure that gave one an impression of combined strength and activity—but of course he was taller than he had been at eleven years old. And Mrs. Abram's eyes, when she addressed him, were invariably directed first to about the middle button of his waistcoat, as though she expected to find his head there, and then raised slowly, with a surprised expression, until they reached his face. His voice, too, appeared to startle her by its full, manly tone. I, who from long experience understood poor Mrs. Abram's manner pretty well, was led to believe that she had a confused notion that Donald's strong voice hurt him; for whenever he spoke she put her hand to her throat, and raised her eyes to the ceiling compassionately. However, I of course kept this discovery—if discovery it were—of Mrs. Abram's state of mind on the subject of Donald to myself. And no one else appeared to observe it.

Grandfather explained to us that Donald had arrived somewhat sooner than he had expected to do, in consequence of finding himself able to come straight on to Horsingham without breaking his journey at our county town, as he had at first intended. He had traveled all the previous night, he said; but was not tired. He had been hungry, he confessed, when he ar-

rived; but his old friend, Keturah, had got ready some food for him without delay, and he had been making a good meal in the doctor's study.

"Yes," put in grandfather, "Keturah is a first-rate woman—always kind, always alert, always with her wits at hand, bright and ready for use. And she knows how to welcome an old acquaintance heartily. I believe she gave you a kiss, didn't she, Donald?"

Donald blushed like a young lady, and laughed like a school-boy, and said, "Yes, Sir."

"It wasn't a Judas kiss, at all events," said grandfather. "That you may depend on. She's as honest as the sun, is Keturah; and if she hadn't been glad to see you, she wouldn't have kissed you. But she is a good soul—a good woman. Yes; Keturah knows how to give a hearty welcome, as if she meant it."

I understood very well that grandfather was hurt at the coldness of my manner, and intended to reprove me for it. But I could not help it. I should have been more cordial had I not been taken by surprise. But now no efforts I could make availed to remove constraint from my manner. Nay, my efforts had a contrary effect; so I was fain to sit still and silent, unless I were spoken to, and pass for a stupid, stiff, *missish* young person.

Grandfather passed his hand once or twice through his "mane," and looked round upon the children, who had remained as quiet as mice since his entrance. His face grew brighter as he looked, and he smiled kindly on them, and patted Teddy on the head. "That's a man!" said grandfather. "You're not afraid of me, are you?"

"No!" said Teddy, stoutly, looking up into his interlocutor's face.

Grandfather patted the child's head again and smiled. He had a great horror of inspiring fear or awe. I believe he had hesitated to come among the little Arkwrights, partly because he fancied they might show some dread of him as "the Doctor." With the gentlest heart in the world, his manner was stern at times; but of this he was quite unconscious, and was grieved and surprised if he perceived any traces of timidity or subjection in the behavior of young people toward himself. The little Arkwrights, however, were too mere children to show either. They read his face aright at once; and the slight cloud there had been on it—brought there, I was sorry to know, by my unsatisfactory reception of Donald—cleared off very quickly.

"Have you had any cakes?" said he, addressing the children.

"Oh yes, ever such a lot! *had* jam puffs!" answered several young voices in chorus. Grandfather's eye lighted on little Jane, who had resumed her place on the hassock, and was again holding my hand, and leaning her cheek against it, as she looked thoughtfully at the fire.

"And, let me see, what's *your* name, you Leprechaun?" said grandfather.

Jane did not move, but she withdrew her gaze from the fire, and fixed it on his face, as she answered, with her usual composure and deliberation, "Dane Aweesle Arkyight."

"Jane *what*? What does she say her name is?"

"Jane Louisa Arkwright," explained Lizzie.

Jane nodded her head with grave dignity, as of an Eastern potentate who should sanction the translation of his words by an interpreter into some "barbarian" speech.

"What's a Lepre—that thing that you called Jane?" asked Martha. Martha was of an inquiring turn of mind. Grandfather explained that Leprechaun was an Irish word for an odd old-fashioned kind of sprite; and that led to a general dissertation on fairies: and *that* led to a delicately hinted request that grandfather would oblige the company with "a story;" and he gave them "Jack the Giant-Killer" in fine style. Teddy confessed frankly that he thought grandfather's story far superior to mine; and, indeed, all the children enjoyed it far more than mine, naturally. Donald, when I remarked this, laughingly said, "Yes; and I think that the reason is that your story took hold of you, instead of your taking hold of it; and, consequently, it carried you a little out of the reach of your small audience."

I mustered courage to ask him what I had been longing to know, namely, how much of my nonsense he had been a listener to?

"I arrived about the time of the appearance of Mesdames Shine and Shadow," said he, in the same sort of shy, low tone I had spoken in, and without turning his eyes toward me. "But I don't think your story was nonsense."

The little Arkwrights were regaled before their departure in the fly with elder-wine, which had a great deal of sugar and spice in it, and was much relished. By the time it was served—it being then the rakishly late hour of half past eight—poor Mary was very drowsy, and even Martha and Teddy showed symptoms of sleepiness, which, it is needless to say, they denied and struggled against with a heroism worthy of a better cause. But little Jane's bright gray eyes were as wide open as ever when she was wrapped up and carried down the garden path to the fly. It was a moonlight night, and as I stood at the glass door of the dining-room, watching the children depart, I saw little Jane's fair face above grandfather's shoulder; he carried her to the coach himself, the bright eyes turned unwinkingly toward the sky, and the clear moonbeams shining in them with solemn serenity.

Soon afterward Mrs. Abram withdrew, being tired, she said. I never shall forget the hopeless perplexity on her countenance when she shook hands with Donald and bade him good-night. She was so undecided what to call him, and hesitated so vaguely up to the very instant of opening her mouth, between "love" (her favorite word), and "Donald," and "Mr. Ayrle," that she finally conferred on him, as he rose to

open the door for her exit, a compound appellation, which sounded, I thought, quite grand and Andalusian—namely, "Don Loveairy."

I slipped away not very long after Mrs. Abram, and left grandfather and Donald chatting by the fire. As I was going up stairs to my room I was waylaid by Keturah. She was full of delight at Donald's arrival. And wasn't he a fine lad? she said. And wouldn't it be a fine thing for the master to have a bright young fellow like that about him? And wouldn't all the house be pleasanter and more cheerful than it had been for many a day? I said I hoped so—and I dared to say so—and that it was very likely. But I suppose my response was not quite cordial enough to be in tune with Keturah's mood, for she looked piercingly at me from under her overhanging black brows, and said, more sharply, "And you know, Miss Anne, it's like to be a comfort to your grandfather to have a young creature about him, and a sort of a bit of sunshine to all on us as we grow older."

"Why, Keturah," said I, smiling, and laying my hand on her shoulder—for, though I was a little vexed, I did not intend to let her either snub me into silence or sting me into anger—"am *I* never to come to Mortlands any more? or am I not to be reckoned among 'young creatures?'"

"Oh, you, Miss Anne!" said the old servant, slowly. "Why, you will be making new friends or new ties, and forgetting all about us, some day, I reckon. It's nat'ral, I suppose. But you know you *haven't* been to Mortlands so often lately but what we have had time to miss you; and we hear of visitors at Water-Eardley—smart gentlemen, with smart uniforms; and what should smart gentlemen go there for but pretty young ladies?"

"You reckon that I shall be forgetting all about you? Keturah, *I* reckon that you're a goose!"

"Aha, child, mebbe you're out in your reckoning then!" returned Keturah, grimly enough. But the next instant that smile, of which I have spoken as being so singularly sweet and attractive, stole over her face, and she kissed me, and bade me "good-night" in her usual manner.

I thought, as I sat brushing my hair that night, that if I had been disposed to be jealous of my place in grandfather's regard, I might have had some excuse for the feeling, in the fuss they all seemed determined to make about Donald. But I was not disposed to be jealous. I said to myself that, after all, Keturah was right in deeming it a good thing for my grandfather to have the new occupation and interest in life which the young man's presence would afford. Donald Ayrle was a link between the past and the present. His name was connected in grandfather's mind with all sorts of youthful reminiscences; and I was very glad to think of his remaining many years at Mortlands. It would be comforting to those who loved my grandfather to know that he would have such a staff and companion at hand when he should

grow very old. And—though Keturah was crabbed, and talked nonsense sometimes when she was cross—still it *might* be that I should not be able to be always within call of Mortlands; so many changes happened in life. There was an elder daughter of Sir Peter Bunny, whom I had never seen, only heard of; she had gone to India, and would probably not revisit her old home for years and years. Her husband was an officer in the army, like—Donald's father.

Almost as plainly as though the words had been uttered from without instead of within, I seemed to hear a voice saying, "Anne, Anne, you are not in earnest! You are trifling and playing at *some feeling* that has no living root in your heart!"

I did not question this importunate voice for an explanation of its sibylline utterance; but I did question myself as to whether I were in earnest or not, and as to whether it were true that I was "playing at a feeling" which had no living root in my heart. Was I drifting idly along under the guidance of a mere fancy? enjoying a make-believe sentiment, just as I had enjoyed enacting make-believe fairies and princesses and Arctic voyagers and Man Friday, when I was a child?

I fell fast asleep in the little bed that had held me so many a night in peace and safety, before having arrived at a final answer to any one question of my self-imposed catechism.

CHAPTER XVI.

I HAD an opportunity of observing Donald better the next morning, as he and grandfather and I strolled round the garden together after breakfast, and of comparing his present appearance with my half-effaced remembrance of him as a boy.

Donald retained the grave candor of his expression, and a mixture of frankness and shyness in his smile, and in a certain trick of the eyebrows, which had made his somewhat homely face attractive when he was a child. But there were thought and purpose on his forehead now, and reflective earnestness in his eyes, that had come with ripening years. And although his dress was plain almost to rudeness, and his gait careless, and his gestures abrupt, he was unmistakably a gentleman. I use the word in no high-flown sense of innate honesty and nobility. I simply mean to express that most subtle and indefinable combination of qualities (consisting, in Donald's case, neither in elegance of attire, nor suavity of demeanor, nor polish of language) which Englishmen recognize as conventionally constituting a *gentleman*. And in saying that Donald was unmistakably a gentleman, I should limit my assertion somewhat. For example, it crossed my mind as we were pacing the moss-grown garden paths, that Sam Cudberry, if called on to recognize Donald as a gentleman, would probably decline to do

so, on the ground of his rough gray coat and thick boots.

To grandfather's great delight, we found that Donald had retained a very vivid recollection of the garden and the shrubbery, and of all the "moving accidents by flood and field" which we had enacted there. It all looked smaller to him, of course, than he had pictured it in his mind, he said. But, with that exception, the garden of Mortlands was precisely what he had remembered and expected.

When our stroll was finished, grandfather withdrew to his study, taking Donald with him, as they had various matters to discuss together, and I said "good-by" to both of them, for I was to return to Water-Eardley in good time.

"I'm sorry you must run away, little Nancy," said my grandfather.

"I promised."

"To be sure, to be sure! I don't mean to urge you to break a promise. Give my love to your dear mother, and tell her that Donald Ayrle means to come over very soon, and pay his respects to her. It will be a nice walk for him some fine, crisp morning; so look for him early."

"Oh, grandfather!" I exclaimed, detaining him by the arm as he was about to turn away, "I did not give you the fashionable intelligence!"

"Now, little Nancy, this is terrible! Not to give *me* the fashionable intelligence, when you know it is the pabulum—that sounds very fine, I think; quite like a newspaper—the pabulum of my existence!"

"Yes, I know," I returned, laughing at his solemn face. "And, therefore, lest you should be starved outright, I hasten to inform you that there is to be a ball at Woolling very shortly. What do you think of *that*?"

He looked as if he thought more of it than I had expected, for his face expressed genuine surprise.

"A ball at Woolling? At the Cudberrys? What on earth for?"

"What for? Why, grandfather, even an unfashionable intelligence understands that a ball is for dancing!"

"Oh, ay, ay! And are you going to this ball?"

"I suppose so. But we are not asked yet."

"How did you hear of it?" asked grandfather, quickly.

"From Mr. Lacer. That gentleman—an officer—a friend of father's. We met him on the race-course."

"I have heard of him."

"Have you?"

"Yes. Good-by, my child. God bless thee!"

Grandfather kissed my forehead tenderly, and laid his hand upon my head. There was something which I could not quite define to myself in his face—a shade of sadness, and an uneasy *questioning* look. I thought of it several times on my way home; but I thought of so many

other things too, that they finally put that look of grandfather's out of my head.

I reached home at such an early hour that there was time for a drive with mother before dinner. My father was not out of his bed. He had taken to be quite a sluggard, seldom rising before eleven or twelve o'clock. And this, I knew, was a great grief to my mother. But she had long since found remonstrances and petitions unavailing to induce him to return to his former active habits. At first, indeed, he would profess penitence, and promise amendment. Then he took to laughing at mother in a kind of superior manner, asking her if she supposed him to be a little boy in need of a nursery-maid to keep him in order. Finally, he had become irritable on the subject, and curtly desired her to hold her tongue, and not bother him.

"I am so glad you have come home early, dear Anne," said my mother, "for I was wishing to have you as a companion in my drive. I am going to Woolling. We have received an invitation to the ball there. It arrived yesterday evening. And, as it is a long time since I have paid Mrs. Cudberry a visit, your father said I had better go and take our answer in person. Your father says we must accept the invitation. For my part, I do not expect much gratification from this ball. But I hope you may enjoy it, child. Though, from the usual behavior of the girls to you, I almost fear you may meet with something disagreeable."

"I don't care a straw for any thing 'the girls' can say or do, mother. So on that score you may be quite easy," I made answer, with quite unnecessary energy. Mother sighed softly as she said, "But don't quarrel with them, Anne, if you can possibly avoid it. Remember, child, they are your dear father's kinsfolk!"

Poor mother! it is touching to look back and see how, as my father lost ground in the esteem of those around him, and as his faults grew to such proportions as made it impossible even for her to ignore them, she replaced her old proud and joyful worship of him by a tender pity; how she encompassed him with a yearning fondness, and would unhesitatingly have shielded him with the soft, faithful breast against any breath of blame or shaft of unkindness. She was delicately fearful of resenting even the coarse insolence with which it frequently pleased the Cudberrys to treat her, lest it might appear that she was less friendly than formerly with "her dear George's cousins."

On our way to Woolling I gave her an account of my grand entertainment to the little Arkwrights, and I informed her of Donald's arrival. She was much pleased to hear of the latter, and said she hoped he would prove an agreeable and useful companion to her dear father. Mother had taken a great fancy to Donald in his childish days, and made me describe him to her as he was now, chatting of him with great interest. Of his personal appearance I found no difficulty in giving a picture. It certainly was not a flattering one. I described

him as a blue-eyed, light-haired young man, with plain features, and a figure rather too broad for his height, clothed in a rough coat, and with sun-burnt hands, which looked as if they had been unacquainted with gloves from the cradle. But I did him the justice to add that he would certainly be recognized by gentlefolks as a gentleman notwithstanding. For the rest, he was very silent and very shy—or, it *might* be, very stupid. Though, on mother's point-blank questioning me as to whether I thought him stupid, I was obliged to declare that, so far as my observation had enabled me to judge, he appeared sensible enough.

We were in the midst of our talk when we arrived at Woolling, and the chaise turned from the village up a lane that led to Mr. Cudberry's house.

I have never seen so altogether *incongruous* a house. It would have been almost as difficult to assign the proper rank to it as to its owners on a first view. It had neither the dignity of decayed gentility nor the coziness of prosperous vulgarity, although there were traits of both one and the other about the building.

The house had no distinctive name. On the rare occasions when Uncle Cudberry received a letter it was addressed to Mr. Cudberry, Woolling; and it duly reached its destination.

Uncle Cudberry possessed a considerable number of acres, which he farmed himself. He was said to grow the best wheat for miles round, and was proud of that reputation. The farm came up close around the dwelling. There was only a small strip of garden dividing it in front from the fields. At the back there was a large farm-yard, with barns, and cart-sheds, and pig-sties, bounded by an ocean of turnip fields. The approach to the house was by a road which, in truth, deserved no higher title than that of a cart-track. It ran through the open fields, and was intersected by no fewer than seven five-barred gates. These gates were always fastened, to prevent the cattle from straying, and whosoever passed through them was admonished, under pain of divers penalties, to shut them again carefully. Very few things excited so much emotion in Uncle Cudberry's usually phlegmatic nature as the finding a gate left open or imperfectly secured. There were certain seasons when the gates were fastened with huge padlocks; and then any adventurous visitor, who was not easily balked by difficulties, might gain access to the house by climbing over sundry stiles of ingeniously inconvenient construction; or he might, if he were a bold equestrian, leap his horse over seven five-barred gates in succession. But I never heard of any one attempting this latter exploit. If neither alternative suited him, he might simply stay away. And this, indeed, was the course which I think recommended itself most strongly to Mr. Cudberry. He would triumphantly bring forward this liberty of staying away as a conclusive argument on his side whenever his daughters

urged him to have a new road made from the village of Woolling to the house.

"Why, lass," he would say, speaking very deliberately, "them as can't get over a stile are but lame dogs."

"That's all very well, papa," Tilly would answer, sharply; "but how *are* people to scramble about like monkeys? You know that second stile beyond the five-acre field is *awful*. And you've never had it mended! And nobody would like to try getting over it that had any decent clothes on; for corduroy is the only thing to stand that stile, and even *that* not always."

"Well, now, look here, Miss Cudberry; do I ask 'em to come? No. Very well, let 'em stay away, then! That's fair. What have you got to say against that?"

And so the new road was never made. The cart-track came up to the edge of the garden; the garden was fenced off from the fields by a wire railing; there was a duck-pond a little to the right of the road on the field side of the wire fence, and a weeping-willow drooped over it. This willow was the only tree visible from the front of the house, except some woods on the horizon, so that the outlook over the flat, well-cultivated, ugly farm was rather dreary. At the back of the house, beyond the farm-yard, there were bits of pretty rural scenery; deep winding lanes, half hidden by tangled hedgerows, and green uplands, and the towers of a noble mansion rising above the trees in a neighboring park, and the bright, changeful river. No part of the house was of a later date than the middle of the eighteenth century; some of it was at least a hundred and fifty years older. The ancient portions of the building were the nobler. They showed traces of wealth, and had been evidently intended for the habitation of gentlefolks. There was a large stone hall, surrounded by carved oaken settles, on the ground-floor; there was a long low room with mullioned windows, and a ceiling of carved oak like the settles in the hall, and a noble mantel-piece of the same wood, which was looked on by judges of the art as a remarkably fine specimen of carving. Up stairs there were two or three spacious apartments, with their floors all awry, and queer closets, and a long rambling passage that led nowhere, and even a trap-door, giving access to a hiding-place in the thickness of the ancient masonry, wherein tradition said a Romish priest, who acted as a political agent from abroad, had been concealed in the days of Cavalier and Roundhead. For the Cudberrys of that time had been stanch Royalists, although I never heard that they or any one belonging to them endured much trouble from persecution. Unless, indeed, it were the Romish priest, who must have felt very uncomfortable, if he ever really did stow himself away in that stuffy little hiding-place.

The more modern part of the house was very ugly, and was tacked on to the other in such fashion as in a great measure to destroy the

picturesqueness of its elder neighbor. The new edifice was of brick, the old one of stone. The former had all the peculiarities which distinguish buildings of the same period, and it is needless to observe that these peculiarities are not beautiful. It all looked pinched and flat and mean. But this part of the house alone was inhabited by the family. The fine old stone hall was used as a lumber-room, and I have seen it filled up with wheat sacks, specimens of mangel-wurzel, disused harness, gig-whips, store-apples, garden-tools, an old hen-coop, a patent plow, and a heap of other heterogeneous objects. The long low room with the carved mantel-piece was empty and deserted, and its flagged floor, cracked and weather-stained, afforded a varied and interesting promenade for many successive broods of chickens, who were occasionally turned in there to keep them out of harm's way. The rooms above were occupied by servants, and were very bare, very dreary, and very draughty; for the wind whistled through them at night as though that part of the mansion were a huge Pan's pipe on which Boreas performed ghostly strains in a minor key.

There was nothing ghostly about the newer part of Mr. Cudberry's house. It was furnished, as to the articles bought within the last ten or twelve years, with a combination of cheapness and gaudiness; as to the older, inherited furniture, with attenuated chairs, and spindle-legged tables, and chilly horse-hair sofas, and horrible round mirrors that made one feel sea-sick to look at them, and depressing specimens of worsted embroidery which might have been worked in dust and ashes for all the color that was left on their faded surfaces.

Uncle Cudberry was, as his family phrased it, "a little close." In other words, he was extremely stingy and avaricious, except as regarded any expenditure which could conduce to his own immediate and personal gratification. And as that which gratified him was far from being identical with that which gratified his family, there arose many contests between the young people and the mother on the one side, and Mr. Cudberry solus on the other. It was hopeless to think of vanquishing him in open fight, but he was sometimes outwitted—or at least his adversaries thought so. I am inclined to doubt this myself. I believe Uncle Cudberry's tactics to have been conducted on one simple and invariable principle; namely, to compel his wife and children to undergo the greatest amount of trouble and vexation and weariness of spirit which he found it possible to inflict, in order to obtain from him the most trifling concessions. He made them beg and pray and manœuvre for the purchase even of common objects of household use which were as desirable for himself as for them, thinking, in his astuteness, that if they expended so much powder and shot on necessities, they would have the less ammunition wherewith to fight for luxuries.

It has taken me a longer time to write all this than it took for the chaise to drive along the cart-track, pass through the gates (happily unpadlocked), and draw up at the wicket in the wire fence of the garden. Mother and I alighted, crossed the bright and neat, though formal garden, and were admitted into the house by Daniel of the ruddy locks, whom I judged to have not long come in from agricultural pursuits, inasmuch as he carried several pounds weight of rich loamy soil on his shoes, and bore traces of the same on his trowsers and on his hands, and even on his forehead, where there was a streak of mud, apparently left there by the application of his own finger.

Daniel grinned until his mouth represented the segment of a circle, and bade us walk into the parlor, as we "knowed the road;" excusing himself from coming beyond the flagged passage, on the ground that he was "too mucky," and that Miss Cudberry would "jaw" him if he spoiled the new carpet.

We assured Daniel that it was quite unnecessary to expose himself to the mysterious perils of being "jawed" by Miss Cudberry on our account, and so entered Aunt Cudberry's sitting-room unannounced.

CHAPTER XVII.

I SAW the other day some gutta-percha dolls, whose faces could be squeezed, by the application of a thumb and finger, into the most comical grimaces. The countenances of those dolls reminded me of Aunt Cudberry. Her face had a sort of India rubber flexibility. The lines in it seemed to be not so much wrinkles as creases, which might give place to other and quite different creases when next she moved her face. Her very nose appeared to have no fixed and permanent outline. And yet you would scarcely have called Aunt Cudberry's an expressive physiognomy, for it was impossible to discover any connection between its contortions and the subject of her discourse. She would frown portentously in relating the pleasantest matter; or widen her mouth, into what on another face would have been a smile, at the moment she was uttering the most woe-begone complaints. She wore a front of brown curls, which was always a little awry. And she wore a large cap, with bows of satin ribbon stuck all over it; and the cap, too, was a little awry. So was her collar; so was her apron. She was not untidy; but she had an air of general lopsidedness. The odd thing to me, in Aunt Cudberry's appearance, was a grotesque resemblance she bore to my father. She was his mother's sister, and there was a decided family likeness between her and her handsome nephew, although it would have been difficult to define wherein it consisted.

She was sewing in the sitting-room when we entered it, and Tilly and Clemmy were practicing a duet at the piano-forte. I always had

a sense of *inappropriateness* in seeing them play the piano. It appeared to be the last thing in the world they ought to have been doing. I was no musician, and therefore did not presume to be critical on their performances. But music seemed to me as *unbecoming* to Tilly Cudberry as a white satin slipper or a wreath of roses would have been to Mrs. Abram!

"Why, now, Mrs. George!" exclaimed Aunt Cudberry, putting down her work and rising to receive my mother. She spoke very loud. If she had not done so, I think she could not possibly have attracted her daughters' attention, for they were playing very vigorously. At their mother's exclamation, they ceased their performance, with a final chord which reminded me of the crashing fall of a tea-tray laden with cups and saucers. I really think there must have been some wrong notes in it. Nobody could have intended that ear-splitting dissonance!

"And how are you, my dear? And Anne, too! Dear me! Poor things! Sit down now, do! And how is George? Po-o-or George!"

Aunt Cudberry said all this in a lamentable tone of voice. There was no special reason for lamentation, but that was "her way," and meant nothing. My mother greeted them all with her usual gentle kindness, and the young ladies left the piano, and, seating themselves near us, plunged into an animated conversation.

"Just imagine, Anne," screamed Tilly, "your walking in without any body to show you the way! You know if it had been strangers, it would have been all the same to Daniel. If pa would only have a man-servant with a little style about him! But pa *is* so obstinate. He wouldn't care if we had a bullock to wait at table!"

"I scarcely think Uncle Cudberry would like that," said I, laughing.

"Oh yes, he would. That's just exactly what he *would* like," retorted Tilly, with the most vehement earnestness. "That's Mr. Cudberry, of Woolling, all over. There you have him! If it wasn't for us and ma there would be no style at all about the place. Not a tinge of it."

"Well, Anne, are you coming to our ball?" asked Clementina.

"Yes, I believe so. Mother came to bring the answer in person, instead of writing."

"Weren't you surprised to hear of it?" said Clemmy. But before I could reply Tilly burst in, "Why should she be surprised! What is there astonishing in our giving a ball, pray? But that's so like you, Clementina. I suppose Anne Furness expected we should do a little like the rest of the world some day, and move a little with the times! We've been moped long enough, Clementina, I *should* think. Anne Furness is not *quite* a fool—not *quite*!" in a tone which seemed to imply that I was as yet only on the border-land of idiocy.

"How is Uncle Cudberry? and Henny? and

Sam?" said I, desiring to change the conversation.

"Oh, Henny and Sam are gone over to Brookfield. Henny wanted to make some purchases of her milliner. Sam, of course, will call on Mr. Lacer. You never knew such friends as Sam and Mr. Lacer have become. Quite chums!"

"Indeed!"

"Oh dear, yes! Mr. Lacer finds Sam very agreeable—most agreeable!"

"Oh!"

"Why, yes, you may suppose so, when you think of what Brookfield is. The commonest of the common."

I reflected that if being uncommon were a *sine qua non* for gaining Mr. Lacer's good opinion, Sam Cudberry, as far as my limited experience of the world went, certainly fulfilled that condition.

"Isn't Mr. Lacer an elegant creature?" said Aunt Cudberry, turning to me at this point.

"I—I—don't know. Yes, I think he is well-mannered."

"Oh, my dear, as to manners, he's perfect. Poor thing! And so amusing! But I must send and tell Mr. Cudberry that you're here. Mrs. George is a great favorite of Mr. Cudberry's."

"Oh, ma!" shrieked Tilly, and fell into a fit of laughter, the cause whereof was and is entirely mysterious to me. But this was no new thing. So many of the Cudberry sayings and doings were so inscrutable to my apprehension that I have sometimes thought my communications with that family resembled the intercourse of a European with some secluded tribe of Indians. The most I could do was to *guess* at their meaning. Very often, no doubt, I guessed wrongly, from want of the necessary insight into their point of view.

Tilly's whoops of laughter had not died away when Mr. Cudberry came into the sitting-room.

He was a thin, dark-eyed, bald old man, who stooped a good deal in his gait. He wore a suit of coarse drab-colored cloth, a red worsted scarf round his throat, and leather leggings buttoned tightly over his lean limbs. His face was as immovable as his wife's was the reverse. His eyes sometimes sparkled when he was angry; but, beyond the necessary motion of the muscles of his mouth when he spoke, I do not think I ever saw any other indication in his countenance that it was made of flesh and blood instead of wood. He spoke in a growling tone, very slowly, very deliberately, and as though he were haunted by a constant suspicion that his interlocutors wanted to *catch* him, to entangle him, to commit him to some rash statement, or, in short, to get the better of him in one way or another.

"Your sarvant, Mrs. Furness," said Uncle Cudberry, shaking hands with my mother. "Yours, Miss Anne. You grow a fine young lass, Miss Anne. Tall and straight. Yes. That's the truth. No mistake about it."

"Oh, *pa!*" cried his daughters in chorus.

"Hey? What's wrong with *you*, Miss Cudberry?"

"Now, *pa!* Just as if you didn't know that nobody says '*sarvant*.' I do wonder that you like to be so vulgar. Why don't you polish yourself up a bit, *pa?*" cried Tilly, with terrific playfulness. I use the word "*terrific*" advisedly, for when it pleased Tilly to be sportive, and to indulge in banter, her voice rose into a shriek, of which I despair of conveying an idea.

"Polish! I'm polished enough," replied Uncle Cudberry, with great deliberation. "Oh yes; as to that, *I'm* plenty polished enough. It don't take much polish, as I know of, to look after the crops. And you can ask any man, woman, or child about the place if they think it 'ud be easy to *do* the master. I reckon they know I wasn't born yesterday, Miss Cudberry."

Strange and incredible as it appeared to me, I had often been assured by my father that Mr. Cudberry had in his youth received as good an education as was usual with gentlemen of his day—a somewhat better education, indeed, than the majority of country squires of his standing. He had been in London, and had even been noted there as a spendthrift. But on coming rather unexpectedly into the property at Woolling (for he was not the direct heir, but inherited on the death of a cousin), a complete metamorphosis took place in his manners and mode of life. The love of money grew upon him year by year. He lived in almost absolute retirement, associating chiefly with mere rustic boors. He adopted their habits and their language. But I used sometimes to fancy that he purposely exaggerated his broad, vulgar mode of speaking in order to mortify his daughters and mock at their aspirations after finery. And yet, with queer inconsistency, he was proud of them, and shared their conviction that the Cudberrys of Woolling were people of very great importance and consideration. It was with some idea, I imagine, of teasing Tilly in particular that Uncle Cudberry made a point of complimenting and praising me whenever he saw me. Especially he would remark on my height, as contrasted with his daughters' small stature. There was only one person to whom I ever saw Uncle Cudberry show a glimmering of courtesy, and that person was my mother. Occasionally in his manner toward her might be discerned some dim traces of the gentleman he had once been. And notwithstanding Tilly's peals of derisive laughter, I believe Aunt Cudberry was right when she said that "Mrs. George" was a great favorite with her husband.

Before our visit came to an end Daniel entered the room, bearing a tray with two decanters on it, a piece of cake, and several wine-glasses. The decanters contained, I knew, cowslip and raisin wine, respectively. No more expensive vintage was ever given to visitors to Woolling in the daytime. Of course the ceremony of offering wine might have been

omitted altogether; but this would have been a departure from a custom which Aunt Cudberry looked upon as quite indispensable in a genteel household.

Daniel had removed in some way a portion of the loam from his trowsers. He had changed his boots, and put on a black coat, which I recognized from its cut as having belonged to Sam Cudberry, and which was so much too narrow for Daniel's broad, bowed shoulders, that he looked as if he were pinioned in it. The smudge of mud remained conspicuously on his forehead; but he grinned round at us, complacently unconscious of, or philosophically indifferent to, this drawback to his personal appearance.

"White wine or red, Anne?" said Aunt Cudberry, when it came to my turn to be helped.

"Cow—" I began, inadvertently, but I checked myself, and answered, "white, please, Aunt Cudberry." It was a point of honor at Woolling not to call the sweet home-made liquor by its real name. "White or red" might equally apply to port and sherry, and Aunt Cudberry found some comfort in the ambiguity of the phrase, although we all knew perfectly well what the wine was, and she knew that we knew it.

"Has George been having any dealings with old Green the coach-maker, do ye know, Mrs. Furness?" asked Mr. Cudberry, abruptly, of my mother.

"Dealings? Mr. Green sold him a pony-chaise. And Mr. Green's grandson came to Water-Eardley to see about repairing it. I know of no other dealings that George has had with him."

I felt guiltily conscious, and my face burned as I listened. Mother did not know then of the money transactions I had heard discussed between Mat Kitchen and my father.

"Ah, well, that's better than I thought."

"Why? What do you mean?"

Mother turned very pale as she put the question, and looked imploringly into Mr. Cudberry's hard face.

"What I mean's neither here nor there. But don't you distress yourself, Mrs. Furness. Old Green has the name of being hard and sharp. He's a cunning man, and knows how to put two and two together and make five of 'em 'stead o' four. But on market-days in Horsingham I sometimes hear a bit of gossip. And they say that the young chap, this Mat Kitchen, is quite as sharp and twice as hard as his grandfather, and that he's getting all the old man's private business into his own hands."

"What business?" asked my mother, innocently. "Has he any other business besides coach-making?"

"Money-lending," replied Mr. Cudberry, nodding his head once emphatically. "And you just tell George to steer clear of the family party. I haven't brought my own pigs to such a bad market, but what I've a right to offer my wife's nephew a bit of advice. Not," he add-

ed, touching my mother's sleeve twice or thrice with the back of his forefinger—quite an animated gesture for him!—"not as I've any thing *but* advice to offer him, you understand!"

My mother would not for the world have shown any uneasiness before the Cudberrys which might have led them to reflect upon or in any way blame her husband. But she was very thoughtful and silent as we were driving home again. And after a long meditation, she said to me, "Anne, I am very glad, after all, that your grandfather—and my husband, for it was quite as much George's doing as your grandfather's, you must always remember that, child!—I am glad, I say, that they insisted on my little fortune being settled on me and my children. It will be at least a provision for you, in case— One never knows what may happen!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ball at Woolling was to take place in a fortnight from the day on which we paid our visit to Aunt Cudberry. During this interval we saw Mr. Lacer rather frequently. My father always made him welcome, and appeared to have taken a quite extraordinary fancy to him. Mother, on the whole, was pleased that it should be so; for Mr. Lacer had made great progress in her good graces also, and, indeed, had become more intimate with the whole family than the length of our acquaintance with him would have seemed to warrant. But, as he said, friendship can not be measured by time; and several circumstances concurred to give him an almost confidential footing among us. The first of these circumstances, however, was one which might have produced a quite contrary effect.

I have mentioned Flower's propensity to drinking. He always contrived to do his stable-work to my father's satisfaction, but in the evening among his fellow-servants he indulged himself in drinking and talking until, they said, he became almost unendurable. Sometimes one or two of the farm people would drop in, on one excuse or another, to smoke and drink beer in the kitchen. It was a practice which my mother strongly disapproved of; but her authority was not sufficient to put a stop to it, and it was impossible to get my father to interfere in any domestic matters. He let things go as they would more and more every day.

On one of these convivial occasions, being half stupefied with tobacco, and more than half drunk with beer, Flower proceeded to abuse the "master's new friend, Mr. Lacer," in no measured terms. The cook reported the conversation to my mother, dwelling minutely on every insolent and vituperative word Flower had used with that curious passion for the painful, mental or physical, which is so often found in persons of her class. One specific charge which it pleased Flower to bring was, that while

he had been employed in the training stables of Lord B——, Mr. Lacer had been caught playing the spy on those sacred precincts, for the purpose of sending information to London which would influence the betting on an approaching race; that he had been detected in trying to bribe a stable-helper to betray some of the secrets of his employer's establishment; that he had narrowly escaped being ducked under the pump by Lord B——'s express orders; and that he (Mr. Lacer) had made the most strenuous efforts to hush up the whole affair, inasmuch as it, together with sundry other transactions of a disgraceful nature, with which Flower professed to be acquainted, would, if published, have ruined him with his commanding officer, and perhaps have obliged him to leave the army.

This miserable kitchen scandal distressed my mother intensely. She repeated it to my father in my presence, and with a vehemence most unusual with her.

My father was also a good deal disturbed by the matter, although less so—alas! far less so!—than he would have been some years ago. At first he had recourse to scolding mother for having given ear to "servants' tittle-tattle," and was very lofty with her. But mother, to my great astonishment, and I think to his, maintained her point with extraordinary firmness. She made him observe that this odious story was not mere vague calumny; that it was a specific and distinct charge, to which the servants and one or two farm laborers had been witnesses; and that it could not and should not be passed over in silence. My father was singularly averse to risking a quarrel with Flower. The man exercised a sort of fascination over him, as it seemed to us; for my father, although a kind master, had too fiery a temper tamely to pass over misconduct in his servants in general. But the spell which Flower exercised was a very simple one, as we saw and acknowledged later. It derived its power from poor father's besetting infatuation. He had been convinced by some means that Flower could give him valuable information about race-horses, their trainers, owners, and riders. Nay, he had once been heard advising my father to "go shares" in the purchase of a yearling colt out of some famous stable, which animal was "safe to win a pot of money, if properly placed, and the thing kept quiet." Poor mother was in mortal terror of this yearling colt for a long time. But father laughed at her, and said, where was *he* to find money to buy race-horses? And the matter finally dropped.

To return, however, to Flower's charge against Mr. Lacer. So firm was mother in insisting on the matter being sifted, and so evident was it that she was entirely in the right, that my father, who had not lost all his old manliness of heart and his hatred of that which was base and lying and cowardly, gave her his solemn assurance that he would tax Flower with having made this odious accusation, and would,

if need were, discharge the fellow from his service at a minute's warning.

The following day Mr. Lacer called. It was in the afternoon, getting on toward dusk. Father was out. We had not seen him since our early dinner, and as he only rose that day in time to get down to the dining-room just as the dinner was being put on the table, and went out directly the meal was over, there had been little opportunity for conversation. Mr. Lacer walked into the small sitting-room, which mother and I chiefly inhabited, and greeted us both as usual. My mother could not feign. There was a constraint in her manner which Mr. Lacer perceived at once, and to our great surprise he at once entered on the subject we had been discussing the previous evening.

"I have been assisting at a rather stormy interview, Mrs. Furness," said he. "I rode round by the stable-yard, and there I found your husband in a towering rage, and Flower in a very trembling and abject condition. And—to be frank—I know all about the head and front of his offending."

My mother turned a startled glance on him. Then she said, "Do you know it, Mr. Lacer? May I ask from whom?"

"From Furness. He told me himself."

There was a silence. I thought Mr. Lacer had acted very wrongly in coming to say this to my mother. He should have waited. Under the circumstances, there was a great want of delicacy in his intrusion into her presence. But his next words altered my judgment a little.

"Mrs. Furness," he said, speaking in some agitation, "I—I hope you'll forgive me; I do indeed. But I could not endure to be under your displeasure. And what an opinion you must have had of me if you believed— But I hope you have *some* confidence in me! I hope you did not give me up on the words of a drunken fool!"

My mother trembled a good deal. Her courage and nerve had been tried too much of late. I crossed the room to her, and seating myself near her, took her hand. After a moment or so she answered, with a firm spirit, although with a quivering voice, "All this is very painful to me, Mr. Lacer. You must know that it is so. I do not wish to think evil of any one. You have been very kind and friendly—but—"

"Dear Mrs. Furness," he broke in, eagerly, "I ought to have told you at first! Flower penitently retracts every word. Of course he does! That seemed to me so much a matter of course that I did not think of beginning by saying so!"

Mother held out her hand, which Mr. Lacer took and raised to his lips. This bit of gallantry made her shyly withdraw her hand, and color like a girl. It was, indeed, rather too high-flown for the occasion; but Mr. Lacer had an impulsive, almost boyish way with him at times, which made one pardon a little exaggeration of manner.

"How deeply I regret," said mother, "and how deeply George will regret, that any friend of ours should have been exposed to such an offense from our servant! What an infamous, dangerous creature!"

"I fear you have taken the matter to heart more than was needful, Mrs. Furness," said Mr. Lacer.

"It seems to me that that was hardly possible," said I. "To us it was no light thing either that an inmate of our household should be a vile calumniator, or that a person received on friendly terms by my father should be—what you must have been if Flower spoke truly."

I had not broken silence before; but I was chafed by Mr. Lacer's way of treating the affair.

"You speak rather severely, Miss Furness. Have I offended you?"

"You are not half angry enough with Flower," I replied, bluntly.

"Anne!" exclaimed my mother, with gentle reproof.

"I was angry enough, I assure you, at first; but really the thing was so absurd, so wild! And the man was drunk, quite drunk. He declares he has no recollection at all of what he said last night."

"Thank Heaven, this will rid us of him!" exclaimed my mother, with a slight gesture of her hand, as of one pushing aside a hateful object.

"Rid you? Oh, I—perhaps I did wrong, but the fellow begged and prayed so for forgiveness, and Furness seemed loth to part with him, and—I put in a word for him to induce his master to look over the offense this once, on the understanding that the very next time he is seen to be drunk he is turned off without wages or warning."

Mother fell back in her chair. "Keep him!" she cried. "My husband means to keep him! Impossible!"

"Do you so strongly object to the man, Mrs. Furness? I had no idea—"

"Most strongly do I object to him. I have reasons for doing so. I am not actuated by prejudice. He is a dangerous, dangerous man! I would give any thing to see him fairly away from my house."

Upon this Mr. Lacer spoke more unreservedly than he had hitherto done about my father's growing infatuation for betting. He had seen, he said, that it distressed my mother, and had seen it with sincere sympathy. As far as in him lay—of course, his power was very limited; he was so much younger than my father, had no claim of old acquaintance, and so forth—he had tried to stand between my father and temptation of that sort. He thought, if he might venture to advise, that mother was wrong in her desire to get rid of Flower. The man was not pleasant, nor sober, nor honest in speech. But he had the rare honesty in a groom of not cheating in his stable. That was a great point; because Furness—mother would forgive him for saying so—was a little careless

and easy-going, did not look into things very closely, and might be robbed right and left by a groom who chose to rob him. Then, as to the other point, Flower's connection with the turf, and his influence over his master, Mr. Lacer must say this. Flower really did know something of the matter. His advice would be sound, in all likelihood, and based on experience. Of course it might be better—well, he would say it certainly *would* be better—if Furness cut the whole thing. But was that likely at present? And if it were not likely, would he not run the risk in losing Flower of finding some one ten times worse?

"It is very generous and forgiving on your part to say all this," said my mother, thoughtfully.

"Well," answered Mr. Lacer, with his frank bright laugh that flashed all over his face, "I am emboldened to speak freely, you see, because I know you are not likely to suspect me of any undue partiality for my friend Flower."

"I wonder," said I, "why he selected you as the object of his slanders! Had you given him any offense?"

"None that I know of. But it really is useless to reason about the matter. The fellow was drunk, and I suppose that he was in a quarrelsome, malicious mood, and confused me, in his stupid head, with some rascal of his acquaintance. I dare say the story he told was true enough, only applied to the wrong person. Don't think any more about it, Miss Furness."

But both mother and I did think about it, and speak about it. After Mr. Lacer had taken his leave we sat over the fire, in the dark, and talked and talked for an hour.

"I do think Mr. Lacer has behaved so well!" said my mother.

"Y—yes."

"You don't seem to agree with me, Anne."

"I think he has behaved as he thought well and kindly; but I doubt his being right. If father is persuaded to keep Flower just because he *might* get a worse man in his place, that is doing evil that good may come of it, instead of simply doing right at all hazards."

Mother sighed. And, after a little pause, she said: "I am not sure, Anne, that your father would in any case have got rid of Flower when once his first anger was over, and the man had begged pardon."

I felt this to be so likely that I was silent.

"And then you know, child," proceeded mother, "it may be that you and I feel this thing to be more dreadful and shocking than gentlemen do. You see Mr. Lacer treated it lightly. Men brought up like Flower can not be expected to have a high standard of morals. We know so little of the world, Anne!"

So Flower remained at Water-Eardley, and the above-narrated circumstance operated, as I have said, to put Mr. Lacer on a footing of intimacy with us all. Mother would never have given her confidence to any one who had sternly disapproved her husband's conduct. But this

Mr. Lacer was far from doing. He contrived to praise my father's generous, hearty, trusting nature, even while lamenting his failings. One day he and my father went off together to a "match" that took place about twenty miles from us. I fancy it was a trotting match between two ponies belonging to some London men. At all events the creatures ran in our country, and were "heavily backed," as they phrased it. Father came back in high spirits. He had won largely, he said; and in the next instant he frowned impatiently, and asked mother why she looked so lackadaisical—what was the matter? She couldn't have put on a more wobegone countenance if he had lost! It made my heart burn within me to see her piteous little smile, and her attempt to treat the rough words as a good-humored jest. Her sweet gentleness softened father's mood, and he came and took her hand and looked into her face and said: "Lucy, I do believe you are an angel." The touch of kindness was more than she could bear—she who was so brave to suffer—and she put her head down on his shoulder and burst into tears; and I ran away and cried to myself in a tumult of pity and indignation.

The next time Mr. Lacer came to see us mother took an opportunity, when my father was out of the room, to say to him, in her simple, sweet way, that she felt a little uneasy at his accompanying father so much to these different races and matches. "You are younger than George, Mr. Lacer; and if he were the means, thoughtlessly, of leading you into temptation, it would hurt me—it would hurt us—so much."

Mr. Lacer flushed crimson, and looked for an instant as if he had scarcely understood her.

"You mustn't be angry with me," mother went on. "You speak of standing between George and temptation, of dissuading him from this and that; but take care that you don't get a taste for gambling yourself. Those kinds of people are very cunning. I scarcely think you can be a match for them. How should you?" And then she gave him a little sermon. The words were commonplace enough, I dare say; but her sweetness and sincerity gave them value. Mr. Lacer repeated father's words. "You are an angel, Mrs. Furness," said he. "If I had had a mother like you—! But my own mother died when I was little more than a baby. If I could keep Furness straight and square I would, on my soul I would; and—don't be afraid for me. I am up to most of their dodges; so much the worse for me, you'll say! Well, I was left to scramble up as I could when my father married again, and I fell into bad hands. I lived in the stables almost. I got into scrapes that I'm ashamed to think of now. My father paid some 'debts of honor' for me once, against his wife's wish—Mrs. Lacer loves money better than any thing in the world—and he told me that it was the last farthing, over and above my allowance, that I had to expect from him. I was a boy of seventeen at

the time, and I have never asked my father for money since. I wish I could forget all those bad times; but I can't undo the past. It is not all my fault, is it? You see I am candid. I think you can feel for me."

He spoke with so much feeling that we were quite moved. He easily showed emotion. The tears were brimming up in his eyes at that very moment. Mother did not think the worse of him for that.

It was the day before the great Woolling ball; Mr. Lacer staid to have tea with us, and we sat round the fire and chatted about the morrow's great event. Father did not scruple to quiz the whole thing, and Mr. Lacer ventured on a few mild jokes about his awe of Miss Cudberry which made us laugh. I was seated nearest to the table, and an idle impulse prompted me to look at a "sporting paper" which lay on it. My father received it regularly, and it had come to be almost the only printed thing he ever read. It was not the sort of literature to tempt me naturally; but as it lay there at my elbow I began idly to glance over its columns. This cursory perusal suggested several reflections which I had the discretion to keep to myself. But all at once my eye lighted on the following advertisement: "Confederate wanted (a *gentlemanlike* person indispensable), with capital, to join the advertiser in carrying out a great thing. Plenty of amusement, combined with profit, for an amateur of racing. No turf habits need apply, as the *coup* must emanate from an unsuspected quarter. Address, Hic et Ubique, Post-Office, Brookfield."

"What an extraordinary advertisement!" I cried, "what *can* it mean?" and I began to read it aloud. Father jumped up in a passion, and snatched the paper from my hand. "That's not reading for young ladies!" said he, angrily. "You'd best stick to your German and Latin" (this with a sneer which he always put on in speaking of my poor little attempts at learning). "I don't pay for your education in order that you may read such things as that!"

CHAPTER XIX.

I HOPE I shall have no reader who will be shocked at the fact, but—the truth must be told—the ball at Woolling began at half past seven o'clock, P.M. It was dark at that hour, being winter-time. But it is useless to disguise that we arrived at Uncle Cudberry's at a little after eight, and were among the fashionably late arrivals. The night was dry; but there was no moon, and we jolted along in the darkness over the deep, frozen ruts in the cart-track that led through the fields. A great stable-lantern hung on the wicket in the garden fence, so that we were able to pick our way across the garden into the house. At the sound of our wheels two or three dogs began to bark, and a shock-headed boy ran out to take the horse. "Can you put him up, Jack?"

said my father. Flower looked about him superciliously, but said nothing. He had been a trifle less openly insolent since the affair of Mr. Lacer. Yes; the horse could be put up, Jack said. "Some on 'em was at the Half-Moon in Woolling, and some on 'em at Farmer Batt's; but the master had given orders as Mr. George's beast were to be put in the stable, and his man were to have summut to drink." Jack emphasized this communication in a manner which gave me to understand how deeply he was impressed by his master's exceptional hospitality to "Mr. George." I do not think that father appreciated it as any peculiar favor.

We went into the house, and were shown into a bedroom, to take our hoods and cloaks off. I was surprised and disappointed to find no more preparation for this great occasion. Every thing looked much as usual. I could not define what I had expected, but I had thought that in some way or other the house would have worn a more festive aspect. There were two candles blinking on the toilet-table, which only seemed to make the dark mirror darker; and there was a woman-servant standing in one corner of the room with a scared, sulky face. We took off our wrappings without much assistance from this damsel, and descended to the ground-floor. Father was awaiting us at the door of the long sitting-room. We heard the tinkling of a piano from within, and entered just as a quadrille came to an end.

The door was flung open for us by Daniel, who presented a curious spectacle in his livery coat. He had a large white cravat wound round his throat, and I shall never forget the effect of his ruddy face and his ruddy locks rising above it. His hands were concealed by white cotton gloves of such enormous dimensions that they looked like the colossal wooden hands which may sometimes be seen swinging as a sign over a hosier's shop. The long, low room was but dimly lighted, considering the occasion. Candles were distributed here and there on little side-tables, and on the mantel-piece, and on the piano. They were not very large candles, for their size had to be accommodated to that of the tall, old-fashioned silver candlesticks drawn forth for the occasion from their swathings of wash-leather; and these candlesticks looked as if they had wasted away with years. There were so many people in the room already that it looked quite full, as those who had been dancing in the quadrille continued to move about the floor. We looked for Aunt Cudberry, but did not see her; and very shortly Tilly caught sight of us, and advanced to receive us. Her first words, uttered in her customary piercing tones, were these: "I'm doing the honors. Ma isn't equal to it. How do you do, Cousin George? How do you do, Mrs. George? Well, you and Anne *are* the two extremes! Black velvet and white muslin! Never mind. You sit down there, Mrs. George, among the dowagers. I suppose you don't mean to dance!"

Tilly had a pink silk dress on. It was rather short in front, and displayed her feet when she walked; when she danced it permitted a view of her ankles. She wore a bushy wreath of artificial flowers round her head of a deeper pink than her gown. I do not know what natural flower they were meant to represent. I have never seen any so large, except hollyhocks. But I suppose they could not have been intended for hollyhocks. Henny and Clemmy wore blue and yellow respectively. Each had a wreath. Clemmy, who was the smallest of the three sisters, appeared almost smothered beneath some white species of shrub. There were branches of it on her breast, and on her sleeves, and on her skirt. She rustled and crackled when she moved, and was constantly entangling herself in the other women's gowns. I had wondered a good deal what sort of people they would be whom we should find at the ball. I did not know many of our Cousin Cudberrys' acquaintance. I think the company would have been considered a rather odd assemblage by most persons. There were Mr. and Mrs. Batt, a neighboring farmer and his wife. Mrs. Batt wore a satin gown and a turban, and looked unspeakably wretched. (The majority of the guests looked that, though.) There were Sir Peter and Lady Bunny seated in state on the sofa, and struggling between their own desire to be sociable and good-humored, and their entertainers' determination to show them off and exalt them, for the glory of the Cudberry family and the humiliation of the rest of the company. There were the doctor of Woolling and his wife and his wife's sister. The doctor was very vivacious, and said to every one whom he came near, "Well! hah, Sir!" or "Hah, ma'am! This is a lively scene. Great exhilaration of the animal spirits, hey?" Mrs. Hamper (that was the name of the doctor's wife) and her sister appeared to be in no danger of overexciting themselves. They sat side by side in one corner of the room behind the piano, and glared with gloomy impartiality upon every one. Mrs. Hamper had Low-Church tendencies, and was supposed to think dancing sinful. "I wonder she came!" said I to Tilly, who imparted this piece of information in my ear. "Oh, my dear! Came? Of course she came. When a Hamper is invited by a Cudberry of Woolling, you *don't* suppose a Hamper would stay away, do you?"

Besides the above-mentioned guests, there was the family of a rich cloth-weaver, and the family of a poor clergyman, who received pupils in his house. And there were some of the said pupils, looking a good deal bewildered, I thought, and dancing meekly with the Misses Cudberry, who coolly handed them over from one to another in this fashion: "Oh, *you* haven't danced with Miss Cudberry yet, have you? Or was it *your* friend who sat out? Ah, well then, you can dance with my sister Clementina next time. Miss Cudberry comes first. That is our rule." Or, "I think *we're* all engaged for this dance. I'll get you a partner. The young

lady in green? No: you'd better ask Miss Jolly this time. We shouldn't like Miss Jolly to feel herself neglected." Miss Jolly was the cloth-weaver's eldest daughter—a very large and powerful young woman, who bore down upon the other waltzers like a man-of-war among a fleet of cock-boats, and whirled her partners out of breath in no time.

I managed to seat myself near Barbara Bunny, who was looking on at the proceedings with her placid blue eyes rather wider open than usual. "Ain't they rather strange people, Anne?" she whispered to me. "Who?" said I.

"Oh, almost all of them. That stout old lady in the red gown that looks like bed-curtains"—pointing toward a certain Mrs. Hodgkinson, whose husband I knew to be a rich farmer, brewer, banker, and land-owner, at a village about five miles from Woolling—"asked me all on a sudden if I liked going out to parties; and when I said 'yes,' she told me *she* didn't. And she thought the best plan was for every body to stay in their own houses, and eat what they'd got! And her son—that's her son with the ruby studs, and the kind of flounce on his shirt-front—asked me to dance with him, and offered me a peppermint lozenge in the middle of the Lancers."

Barbara's voice was almost plaintive as she narrated these experiences, and the contrast of her serious tone with the absurdity of that which she was saying, set me off into a fit of irrepressible laughter.

"It is delightful to see you so merry!" said a voice very near me. I turned, and saw Mr. Lacer and Sam Cudberry standing behind my chair. It was the former who had spoken. "Oh, Mr. Lacer," exclaimed Barbara, just like a child, "I am so glad to see you!"

I could almost have echoed the exclamation myself. Mr. Lacer's presence in that company was truly welcome. One felt at least safe with him. As to the others, there was no anticipating what they would say or do next. Mr. Lacer made Barbara a very low bow, and professed himself overwhelmed by her kindness. But it was not difficult to see, by the twinkle in his eye, and the smile that flashed for a moment over his face, that he was not vain enough to put down Miss Bunny's delight at seeing him entirely to the score of his personal merits.

At this moment Clementina struck up a waltz tune on the piano. There was no professional musician engaged. The performance of the music was divided among such of the ladies as could and would play. And the varieties of rhythm thus obtained were very remarkable.

"Is this a waltz?" asked Mr. Lacer, doubtfully.

"Oh no!" screeched Tilly Cudberry, bustling up to us. "It's the Portuguese. Don't you know the Portuguese?" She turned to Barbara as she spoke, and Mr. Lacer seized the opportunity to whisper to me, hastily,

"Will you dance this with me, whatever it is? Do, *please*, Miss Furness!" I bowed, without daring to raise my eyes for fear I should laugh. I was just in the mood when the slightest touch would have overbalanced my gravity, and disgraced me forever in the eyes of my cousins.

"I don't know the Portuguese," said Barbara, timidly.

"Oh, you must learn! Sam will be delighted to teach you. Sam, give Miss Bunny your arm, and take her top couple but two. Henny and I dance first and second couple."

Barbara was led off to her fate unresistingly. Then Tilly turned to Mr. Lacer. "Now, Mr. Lacer," said she, with a little asperity. "Come! You know the Portuguese!"

Mr. Lacer protested that he had been familiar with it from boyhood. Miss Cudberry waited, standing opposite to him with somewhat the air of a street constable, who has desired a refractory apple-vendor to "move on." "Miss Furness is going to do me the honor of dancing it with me," added Mr. Lacer, intrepidly.

"Anne? Why, goodness! Anne don't know it."

"I am about to have the pleasure of teaching it to her," said Mr. Lacer; and he led me to the bottom of the double line that was being formed down the room. Tilly remained staring after us. I was by no means sure that she would not even then seize Mr. Lacer by force, and drag him to the top of the room; it was so entirely against the rules and regulations at Woolling for a gentleman to dance first with any one but Miss Cudberry! However, Tilly pressed Mr. Hamper, the doctor, into the service, and taking her place with him for her partner, gave the signal for the dance to begin.

I never have seen the "Portuguese" any where but at Uncle Cudberry's. The girls had learned it long ago at school, and I think it must have been the exclusive property of their dancing-master, and his own invention into the bargain. But with their habitual way of ignoring that that which was familiar to them might not be so to the rest of the world, the Misses Cudberry assumed that every one knew the Portuguese, and insisted that it should be performed. It was the dreariest dance in the world. You advanced and retreated, and took hands, and went round and round monotonously to an old-fashioned waltz tune played very slowly. Tilly and Henny, who were proud of their dancing, did elaborate "*steps*," and appeared to enjoy it. But the people who couldn't do steps cut a very awkward figure, and gloom was depicted on their faces.

Miss Jolly had got the youngest and meekest of the pupils in tow, and was bearing down powerfully on the other dancers with that weak craft in her wake, when she went round and round with him, her petticoats making a kind of maelstrom into which small or unwary persons were continually being, as it were, attracted by

an irresistible power. Twice I saw Clementina Cudberry engulfed—bowery branches and all—in the voluminous folds of Miss Jolly's thick corded silk gown, that went flap, flap, flap, like the main-sail of a ship. I don't believe Miss Jolly was aware of Clemmy, until some by-standers stepped forward to extricate her. And had it not been for that circumstance I have no doubt Miss Jolly would have swept on through the mazes of the Portuguese with no more embarrassment or difficulty than if Clemmy had been a bramble clinging to her skirt.

I had been in a laughing mood all the early part of the evening, but the influence of the Portuguese would have depressed Puck himself! By the time we went in to supper every one looked exhausted. Poor mother had been wedged in between Mrs. Hodgekinson and Mrs. Batt, and had had to listen to their conversation for three mortal hours. The two ladies had a standing feud which had lasted so long that I believe the original subject of it had been forgotten. However, that did not prevent them from sparring at each other with great vindictiveness whenever they met. They talked to my mother and at each other; occasionally sending a shot direct to the enemy, and blazing away very fiercely. I conjectured that they found some enjoyment in these hostilities. Certainly nothing would have been easier than for either party to get up and walk away from the other. But they remained in juxtaposition all the evening.

Mr. Cudberry achieved the distinction of, for once, uniting the combatants and mortally offending both of them, by coming up to offer my mother his arm to lead her to supper, and saying audibly as he did so, "Why didn't some o' the girls look after you, 'stead of leaving you to be a shuttle-cock betwixt them two tough old battle-dores? I reckon you'll have had a bad time of it, Mrs. George!"

At supper appeared Aunt Cudberry, whom I had scarcely caught a glimpse of before. She put one in mind of a child's drawing on a slate, she was so very much awry, and looked so oddly out of the perpendicular. She really did resemble a fancy portrait of a lady I had seen executed by one of the little Arkwrights. She wore a plum-colored satin gown, and a cap with roses in it. And she had a very large lace collar on that came down half-way over her chest, and was fastened by a brooch containing a daguerreotype portrait of her son. Poor Aunt Cudberry! She had been toiling in the kitchen with her plum-colored satin skirt pinned up, and made her appearance at the head of the table with a hot, red face, but still smiling with gutta-percha flexibility.

The supper, as the Cudberrys boasted, had been entirely prepared at home. There were a roast turkey, and a couple of pairs of fowls, and a piece of beef, and a ham. And these were all very good fare in themselves; but they were spoiled by an extraordinary taste like the

smell of new furniture, that pervaded them all more or less. It was some time before I could guess at the cause of this strange circumstance; but when I turned my eyes on the sweets I fancied I had discovered it. Aunt Cudberry, from motives of economy or convenience, had evidently purchased a quantity of gelatine for the preparation of her jellies, and so forth. There was gelatine in all forms and of all colors of the rainbow; but, alas! these varieties were strictly and solely external, for every sweet dish on the table tasted like all the others, and a subtle stickiness had communicated itself to all the edibles. I believe the cook must have glazed the turkey and the fowls and the beef with gelatine. Miss Jolly's brother, whose manners were not polished, and who was considered a wag in his own family, whispered to Barbara Bunny, "Glue, by jingo!" and made grimaces, as though his tongue were stuck to his mouth, after swallowing a spoonful of jelly, which dreadfully disconcerted poor Barbara. The young gentleman with the ruby studs, and the founce on his shirt-front, ate nothing after the first mouthful or so. Perhaps he had taken away his appetite with peppermint lozenges; but he drank glass after glass of wine, and my attention was attracted to him as he sat opposite to me by seeing his mother, Mrs. Hodgekinson, stretch forth her arm and remove the decanter from his reach, and when he remonstrated she said, quite savagely, "No, William, you don't. It's no better than poison. British port, indeed! I know it."

It is to be feared that the Cudberry hospitality did not convert Mrs. Hodgekinson from her unsociable theory that it was best for folks to stay in their own houses and eat what they've got!

When we returned to the dancing-room, I offered to play a waltz for Tilly. My musical skill was extremely small, but it sufficed for that. Tilly received my offer very ungraciously, but did not hesitate to accept it. As I sat at the piano-forte running my fingers over the keys, and waiting until the dancers should be ready, I unwillingly overheard a little family quarrel between Tilly and Henny Cudberry and their brother. The subject of it was Mr. Lacer. Tilly was furiously indignant at what she termed his neglect of her. Sam, who was willing to support the family dignity so far as it was comfortable and convenient to himself to do so, but not one inch farther, bluntly told her she was a fool, and that he was not going to have *his* friend set against him by her nonsense. Henny sided with her sister. There was a sharp altercation. "You *must* give him to understand, Sam," said Tilly, briding and shaking her head till the hollyhocks quivered again, "that the person to be attended to here is Miss Cudberry. He hasn't asked me to dance once. It's shameful."

"Well, I suppose he don't want to. Is it my fault? You should make yourself more agreeable."

"I think, Sam," observed Henny, waspishly, "that you might stand up for your own family. I always did suppose that the Miss Cudberrys of Woolling were somebody."

"Oh, blow it! I ain't a-going to quarrel with Lacer, and so I tell you. He's promised to introduce me to ever such tip-toppers in his regiment. If I was to say, 'Please would you be so kind as dance with my sister?' he'd laugh at me, wouldn't he? You want to make a fellow look like a fool. And if he likes dancing with somebody else better than you, it's no good trying to bully him out of it. Added to which," continued Sam, with much candor, "I don't believe he'd stand it!"

I felt very uncomfortable during my involuntary eaves-dropping, and played away as loud as I could; but it was not easy to drown the Cudberry voices.

Later I observed Mr. Lacer dancing with Clementina, and afterward with Henny; but I knew that would not suffice to appease "Miss Cudberry." Indeed, when I considered within myself what amount of enjoyment had been derived by any one from this so much anticipated ball, it seemed to me to be distressingly little. Mrs. Batt was in a confirmed state of "tiff" the whole evening. Mrs. Hodgekinson's maternal breast was distracted by apprehensions as to the results of the "British port" on the constitution of her only son, besides being in a glow or smoulder of indignation at not having been taken in to supper by the host. Mrs. Hamper and her sister appeared to be a prey to the profoundest gloom. Aunt Cudberry was tired and worried. The clergyman's pupils, from being simply meek and tractable, had sunk into a condition of exhausted imbecility—due perhaps partly to the port, but also in a great measure to the Portuguese! In brief, the only persons who did not exhibit signs of more or less severe suffering were Uncle Cudberry and Miss Jolly. The former was as undemonstrative as the figure-head of a ship. The latter was blessed with marvelous vigor both of body and spirit. Mr. Lacer gave me his arm to conduct me across the garden when we went away, and as we followed my parents toward the carriage he whispered, with a sigh, "By Jove that was severe, Miss Furness! You look quite done up."

"I am rather tired."

"I am ashamed to say that *I* am, but it is the truth. There's something peculiarly exhausting about the atmosphere of that house, I do believe."

"Not for every body, it seems. Look there."

He turned in the direction to which I pointed, and we saw flitting at regular intervals across the window-blind a colossal shadow, accompanied by a smaller one. It was Miss Jolly performing a final polka with one of the pupils.

CHAPTER XX.

DONALD AYRLIE had been to Water-Eardley according to his promise. He walked out to us twice in the morning, each time arriving long before my father was out of bed. On the first of these occasions he asked for Mr. Furness, and being told that he had not yet left his room, he inquired with much concern what was the matter with him. The second time Donald came he did not mention my father, and I think poor mother was half inclined to be vexed and offended by the omission, although it relieved me of some embarrassment. Her love for my father had become a very jealous love. For, alas! it often needed justifying to herself, and she was as resentful as her sweet nature permitted of any seeming slight to him from others.

We told my father that Donald Ayrlie had been to see him. "To see *me*?" he answered, coldly; "what will Dr. Hewson say to that?"

No one ventured to make any reply. My grandfather's name was rarely mentioned in father's presence now. The estrangement between them had grown rapidly of late. Grandfather could force himself to be silent as to his son-in-law's reckless course of life; but father's conscience would not be silent. I believe it spoke bitterly whenever the dear old man was present, and made my father savage with the pain and shame of its reproaches. The two men saw each other very seldom. Mother and I avoided speaking of my grandfather save when we were alone together, lest I should be forbidden, in some burst of temper, to go to Mortlands. As it was, father troubled not himself about my spending the day there whenever I chose; but had he once been provoked into forbidding me to go thither, mother and I were convinced that he would not easily have relented. So the mention of Donald's name having been unfavorably received, we avoided the subject in father's presence thenceforward.

To say the truth I had not been thinking much of Donald or of my grandfather either during the fortnight preceding the Woolling ball. My head had been full of muslin skirts, satin ribbons, artificial flowers, and other trumpery. My vanity began to develop itself portentously. I neglected my studies. I had not been near Mr. Arkwright's house for two weeks. I passed much time before the looking-glass; but the hours so spent were by no means all delightful. I never attained to such a pitch of self-satisfaction as to make them so. I could not then, or ever, hoodwink my conscience. Shut my mind's ears and eyes as persistently as I would against the higher things of which I had had some hints and glimpses, there remained chinks and crannies through which came light and sound.

The morning after the ball I rose at my usual hour. Mother was fatigued, and did not leave her room. I was alone in the little sitting-room, when Donald came striding across the

garden. I saw him from the window. There was a slight sprinkling of snow which had fallen during the night, and his firm, rapid step made it crackle. He lifted his hat when he saw me, and the wintry sunlight shone on his hair and on his clear, candid eyes, and on his cheek all a-glow with health and exercise. It did not take him long to reach the sitting-room. Donald had more *directness* of mind and movement than any one I ever knew.

His first inquiry on finding me alone was for my mother. When I said she was not down yet, being fatigued by her last night's dissipation, Donald said he had forgotten or had never known on which day the ball was to take place, otherwise he would not have come to Water-Eardley so early. But Dr. Hewson had sent him expressly to ask me to go and spend the day at Mortlands if it were possible. "I meant to have asked you to walk back with me, as it is such a fine, bright morning," said Donald, "but perhaps you would be too tired to walk?"

I said no, I should not be too tired. I had a slight headache, but the fresh air would take that away, only I must first see how my mother was, and if she could spare me. I ran up stairs, and easily obtained my mother's permission to go. She was always willing and even eager that I should go to Mortlands. When I came down into the sitting-room with my bonnet and warm shawl on, ready to set out, I found Donald looking at one of the "sporting papers" which lay on the table. He pushed it on one side when I came into the room, and made no remark. But the circumstance reminded me of the strange advertisement I had seen. I did not like to speak to Donald on the subject, but I resolved to mention it to my grandfather. The words, "Address, Post-office, Brookfield," haunted me. Brookfield! Who could the person be at Brookfield who needed a "confederate" for any such purpose as that indicated in the advertisement?

"Your friends in Horsingham have not seen much of you lately, Anne," said Donald, when we were outside the gates of Water-Eardley.

"No; I have been remiss. I must make amends. How are the Arkwrights? I'm afraid Mr. Arkwright must be angry with me for neglecting my lessons this last fortnight."

"You could scarcely have taken your lessons at his house. The children have all been very ill. I have been in Wood Street every day—sometimes twice a day."

"The children ill! Oh, poor little children! How sorry—how very, very sorry I am! Are they better? Poor Mrs. Arkwright! What has been their illness?"

"An ordinary childish disorder enough; but they had it badly. They are mending now, however. Your grandfather has been so good to them."

"Bless him! He is always good."

"And they have had another kind friend—a humble friend. Alice Kitchen has been at the Arkwrights' night and day. She sat up with

little Mary, who was the worst, for three nights, and made the poor mother take some rest."

"Alice Kitchen!"

"Yes. She made great friends with the children at Mortlands. They have been once or twice since your grand party to play in the garden. Alice heard a great deal about them from old Keturah, and when they were taken sick, she went and carried them some jelly of her own making; and in some way she contrived to win Mrs. Arkwright's heart. Alice is a good woman."

I felt so grieved and self-reproachful that my heart was full. What must they have thought of me, taking no heed of them in their sorrow?

"I wish I had known it!" I exclaimed. "How heartless they must think me!"

"To say truth," returned Donald, "I don't believe Mr. and Mrs. Arkwright have been thinking much of any thing except the children. But little Jane mentioned you yesterday, and Mrs. Arkwright told her she would ask you to go and see her. The worst is over; and luckily the worst was over before the Kitchens' trouble came."

"What! are they in trouble too?"

"Old Green, the coach-maker, is dead. He died at twelve o'clock the night before last."

A great many thoughts rushed into my mind at this news. I thought of the conversation I had been a witness to between my father and Mat Kitchen; and I wondered—half hoping, half fearing—whether the old man's death would relieve my father from any immediate pressure of debt. I thought, too, of Mr. Kitchen and of Alice, and of the change this event would make in their fortunes.

"My old enemy, Mr. Matthew Kitchen, will be a rich man, I suppose," said Donald.

"And his father and his sister—will not they inherit a share of Mr. Green's money?"

"I know little about it. But some people say that Matthew had purposely estranged his grandfather from every one, in the hope of clutching every thing for himself. He is not a good sort, Mr. Mat. Do you remember our tea-drinking at his father's house, Anne—and the butter-cakes?"

"And your defiance. How heroically brave I thought you!"

Upon this we drifted into talk of the old time, growing gradually engrossed with ourselves and our own thoughts, to the exclusion of less selfish topics, as is the wont of young people. We were talking with so little heed of what was passing around us, that a swift horseman, mounted on a pretty chestnut horse, overtook us, and shot past us almost before we were aware of the sound of the animal's hoofs, although they clattered noisily enough on the hard, frozen road. In passing, the rider, with a quick, dextrous movement, raised his hat to me, and was gone in a moment beyond the possibility of perceiving the return salute which I, rather awkwardly and confusedly, sent after him.

The start and surprise made me redden. I felt my face burn, and it burned none the less for seeing Donald look surprised and inquiring, though he asked no question.

"That is a friend of father's," said I—"a friend of ours. How fast he was riding! It quite startled me. It was Mr. Lacer. Haven't you heard mother speak of him?"

"Oh!" said Donald. He relapsed into silence, and—I am sure unconsciously—began to stride along at a great pace. Fortunately we were within a few yards of Mortlands, or I should have had much ado to keep up with him.

CHAPTER XXI.

GRANDFATHER spoke to me very long and earnestly that day. He walked up and down the garden with me before dinner, talking with me for an hour or more. He began by saying how long it was since I had been to Mortlands, not, however, reproaching me in the least. Then he asked me how things were going on at home. I had not a very cheering account to give. There was little change in father. I read more of troubles and anxieties in mother's face than I was ever explicitly told by word of mouth; and I said this to my grandfather. He walked up and down the path in silence once or twice, with a vexed look on his face and a puckered brow. Then he told me that some time ago—at the period when my father gave up the greater part of his farm—he (grandfather) had proposed to my parents to take me to live altogether in his house. They had rejected the proposal. My father had even been angered by it, so that grandfather had said no more. He had reason to think now, however, that the plan might no longer be so unacceptable. He had my mother's leave to broach it to me. What did I say to it?

The first thing I said was, "Oh, grandfather, I couldn't! I never could leave mother!"

He put his hand on my forehead and stroked it gently, without saying a word for a little while. Then he went on to explain that money troubles were gathering fast around us. He had, indeed, from what he had heard in Horsingham, been led to expect that a great crash was imminent months ago. But the difficulty had been tided over in some way that he did not comprehend; perhaps by money won on some race-course; perhaps by borrowing. (I thought of what Mr. Cudberry had said of old Green's money-lending, and I remembered once more father's interview with Mat Kitchen.) In either case no permanent mending of George Furness's fortunes had been achieved. No permanent mending could be achieved unless great changes were made. Grandfather's own notion was that it would be well to give up the farm entirely, let the house, or sell the remainder of the lease, and thus pay off all debts,

which, he conjectured, the money thus realized would suffice to do. Then my father should either obtain a situation as manager of some large farm, or some similar employment, or he and my mother could, at the worst, subsist decently for a time on the interest of her little fortune, especially if I were provided for at Mortlands. The main thing, in grandfather's judgment, was to get my father away from Horsingham, so as to break off all racing connections. In that lay his only hope.

I listened with a growing oppression on my spirits. "Is it so bad with us, grandfather?" I asked.

"It is as bad, fully as bad, as I have told you, little Nancy. You are a woman grown, though I still give you the child's nickname. And you are coming into the heritage of adult mortals. I don't think you wish to shirk your share of the family burden."

"No, indeed. But, grandfather," I added, after a pause of reflection, "do you think it at all possible to bring father to consent to give up the farm and the house?"

"Rightly asked, child. I am glad you can bring your brains to bear on the matter, though you do look so white and scared—poor little Nancy! I own I thought the project very hopeless at first. But your mother has been working at it for a long time. Her influence over George is not wholly lost. He seems gradually to have been brought to contemplate the scheme."

"I am sure father would wish to pay his debts."

Grandfather opened his lips as if to speak, and then closed them again without having spoken. At length he said: "Your father, Anne, of course would feel such a change in his position as the one I speak of as a great misfortune. It would involve the making of a considerable sacrifice. I do not at all blink that fact. But I am sure the sacrifice ought to be made—for his own sake quite as much as for others. Your mother is ready to do her part."

"Would they—would they go away from Horsingham altogether?"

"Altogether? What does that mean, Anne? Speak your thought clearly, child."

"I mean, would they go to settle themselves in a distant country, with no idea of returning hither at all?"

"Such would be my advice, and, I think, your father's desire. But it would greatly depend on circumstances, of course."

"Grandfather, I could not leave mother. I could not! I would not be a burden to them. I have been taught. I can teach. I can sew. It would not be right to leave mother!" And I burst into tears.

"Not if she wished it, Anne?"

"She always wishes to put others before herself."

"Well, child; well, well; God forbid that I should urge you against your conscience."

"Dear grandfather," said I, throwing my arms about his neck, "don't think me ungrateful to you. I know how good and kind you are."

"Tut, tut, tut, child! There, there! we will speak farther by-and-by. Let the matter soak into your mind. We are called upon to decide nothing hastily."

I went away to my own little room—the room that had been mine at Mortlands from my earliest remembrance—and sat down on the white bed to think, and to wipe away the tears from my streaming eyes. One idea that returned again and again, growing more and more distinct from out the tossing sea of my thoughts, was that Mr. Lacer had been partly instrumental in inducing my father to think for an instant of making the proposed sacrifice. The scheme might not, perhaps, have been laid before him by my father. Indeed, it was probable that it had not been. But Mr. Lacer's influence was always used, as he told us, to keep my father from his fatal infatuation—to "keep him straight," as he phrased it. He often said—I had often heard him say—that the husband of so sweet and good a woman as Mrs. Furness could never do too much to show his appreciation of her, and that she deserved to be considered in every thing. In his presence my father would often restrain the hot temper which had of late displayed itself even toward the wife whom he loved. He did love her dearly to the last. I know it now, although at that time the bitterness of my resentment for all he made her suffer often hardened me from acknowledging it.

Despite grandfather's approving remark that I was able "to bring my brains to bear on the matter," I fear that as I sat on the little white bed the matter coursed through my brains at its own will. I delivered myself up to the thoughts that came and went like cloud-shadows on a windy day. But by the time I went down stairs to dinner I was fully resolved that I would remain with my parents if they would let me.

The dinner was not very cheerful. To me there had always been an atmosphere of contentment in Mortlands, although I doubt not strangers would have found the old house dreary and dull. But the ghosts of all my day-dreams, from childhood upward, peopled Mortlands for me, from garret to basement. And then there was the presence of my dear grandfather; or, if not his presence, the knowledge that he was at hand, in his garden or his study. But now an oppression of spirit weighed on us all. Grandfather was thoughtful and absent; Donald was very silent and reserved; Mrs. Abram for once was not the most lackadaisical of the party.

We talked of the Arkwrights. That was not a cheerful subject. Grandfather said they were very, very poor, and that Mr. Arkwright was hampered with debts. Then we spoke of old Mr. Green's death, and *that* was not a

cheerful subject. The old man had not been beloved; there could be little pretense of regretting him among the members of his own family. But it was doubtful whether he had not been as unamiable in death as in life, and bequeathed the bulk of his money to the grandchild who least needed it. People began to say, they told me, that it would most likely turn out that Mat Kitchen would get all. Old Green thought a deal of him. He was a steady-going young man; none of your squandering spendthrifts; regular at chapel; quite a pious person. Folks like to leave money to money. Dribbling away a good sum among a lot of poor people was like pouring water into a sieve. And so forth.

"I hope poor Alice will get something," said I.

"I don't think she expects it herself," observed Donald. "Her brother has been far from kind to her lately. He kept her away from old Green's bedside to the last. One grievance he has chosen to pretend against her—for it must be pretense—is, that she was so much at the parson's, as he calls Mr. Arkwright's house. He says it is enough to cause scandal among her own congregation! Can you fancy the brute being such an audacious humbug?"

Grandfather and I could not help smiling at the strength of Donald's phraseology. Mrs. Abram raised her eyes, and did not smile. "Dissenters!" she murmured, "poor creatures!"

"Why, Judith, don't you think Matthew Kitchen might be a canting curmudgeon even if he were *not* a Dissenter?" said my grandfather.

"Ah, love! who shall say? But, of course, *he* has more power over 'em when they put themselves out of the pale of the church."

No one replied to this dogmatic position. And shortly afterward we left the dinner-table.

I had expressed a desire to go out and see Alice. It was arranged that Donald should walk with me to her house, and that we should afterward proceed to Mr. Arkwright's, there to meet grandfather, who would be paying his medical visit to the sick children.

Burton's garden looked the same as it had looked when I first saw it. And the Kitchens' little house looked the same also. It was as bright and neat and orderly as ever. There was the same colored sand on the tiny garden path outside it; and it seemed to me that the same flowers were growing there, leaf for leaf, as had met my childish eyes twelve or thirteen years ago.

We found Alice in the parlor, with a large board placed over the table-cover, cutting out some black stuff for a mourning gown.

"Why, Mr. Ayrle," she exclaimed, clapping her hands and letting the scissors fall when she saw him. "And Miss Anne! Well now this is friendly, and like old times, isn't it?"

We had found the front-door merely latched, and had walked in without the ceremony of knocking. Alice was alone in the house. Her father was gone to his work, she said. What good would it do for him to stop at home? Besides, there was a job at the shop to be got out of hand. Mat was sure to have it done in time, so as not to disappoint a customer, and make folks think the business wouldn't be carried on as usual. And Mat was master now to all appearance. Well, when milk was spilt, she supposed it was best to wipe it up out of the way. Crying over it would do no good, as *she* could see. We must sit down, and have a glass of ginger wine, and a slice of seed-cake—her own making both, and warranted of the best. For her part, she could do without dainties; but what she did have she would have good.

Alice was as loquacious and apparently in as good spirits as ever. She bustled about into the kitchen and back again to fetch the wine and cake. She would hear of no refusal, but whipped away her work and the board, and spread a snow-white cloth over one bit of the table, and set glasses and knives and plates on it, with the brisk decision habitual to her. There was not the remotest pretense of being in grief about her voice or her movements. So perfectly unconcerned did she seem that I felt quite bashful in stammering out—"I was sorry to hear of Mr. Green's death, Alice. I only learned it from Mr. Ayrlie this morning."

"Thank you, Miss Anne. Yes; he's gone is poor grandfather. He was full of years, you know. Take another glass, Mr. Ayrlie. It warms the stomach on a cold day like this. And there's no trash in it—no 'dulteration. Shop things is full of 'dulteration. I hear as they put it in pretty well in every thing nowadays. Grandfather was greatly respected, and he left a good bit of property behind him. No one can say to the contrary of that."

"Some of it ought to fall to your share, Alice; and I hope it will," said I.

"Ah! ought stands for nothing in this world, Miss Anne. And I fancy that's about all I shall get. I'm making myself a black gown, you see, whether or no. It isn't for me to show any want of respect to my poor mother's own father. As for crying and sobbing, I can't play the hypocrite. But I shall put on a decent bit o' mourning. Mrs. Mat, my sister-in-law, she cried a good 'un. 'Why, Selina,' says I, 'you cry enough for two, though you are but a connection by marriage; so there's no need for me to add to the family lamentations. But I've no doubt Mat managed it all right, and that grandfather has left his money to your satisfaction.' 'Why,' says she, jerking the pocket-handkerchief away from her face as sharp as possible, 'what do you know how he's left his money?' 'I don't know,' says I; 'but I guess you needn't bother yourself. It'll be right enough for you, *I* lay. *So you can go on crying again quite comfortable.*'"

There had for some time been warfare between the sisters-in-law. So long as the battle was fought with the tongue, Alice would undoubtedly have the best of it, for Selina had always been dull and slow-witted. But "Mrs. Mat" could have final recourse to the heavy artillery of solid facts. Her silk gown, her gold watch, her new carpet for the sitting-room, her china dinner-service, her patent roasting-jack that went with a spring—were all metaphorically hurled at Alice's head. And if they did not crush, they undoubtedly discouraged her; for Alice was by no means indifferent to such things. Like most Horsingham people, she had a keen eye to the main chance, and a very thorough respect for property.

We had some difficulty in getting away from Alice in time to keep our appointment; for she had heard of the ball at Woolling, and begged to be told what I had worn, and what mother had worn, and what all the other ladies had worn, and interrupted my description with so many ejaculations of admiration, and so many running comments in her own loquacious manner—cutting away at the mourning garment all the while—that it became quite a long affair.

"And our old lodger was there, I heard say—Mr. Lacer. He's a pleasant-spoken chap—gentleman," said Alice, correcting herself. "They do say he's going to leave the army. Father heard some talk about it down at the shop between two sporting gents as come in to look at a dog-cart. I think it would be a pity a'most; for Mr. Lacer's a fine figure of a man—*may* be a bit too stout for his years; and he looks grand in his red coat. Have you seen him, Mr. Ayrlie?"

"No," answered Donald, shortly. Then he added, with his scrupulous truthfulness, "I believe he passed me on horseback this morning. I did not see his face. I don't know him. Anne, I'm afraid I must ask you to come at once. We shall be late."

Alice's blue eyes shot a keen glance on him, and then on me. I felt it rather than saw it.

She detained me by a corner of my shawl just as we were going out, and whispered:

"He's as good as gold, is Mr. Donald. You don't know, Miss Anne, how high the folks think of him here. And as for Mr. Lacer, he bain't fit to tie Mr. Donald's shoe-string, for all his red coat."

CHAPTER XXII.

ALICE's parting words, and her manner of saying them, vexed me—none the less that I knew they were intended to have a contrary effect. I felt ill at ease, and Donald not being in a very bright humor either, we walked along almost in silence until we came to the house in Wood Street.

My grandfather was up stairs, visiting his little patients, the servant told us, and Mrs.

Arkwright was with him. Mr. Arkwright was in the parlor—the little dark parlor, that looked as gloomy as a cavern on this winter day—eating a cheerless meal by himself. I noticed, though, that the cloth which covered the tray was specklessly white, and that the glass he drank from and the willow-pattern plate he ate from were pure and glistening. He seemed glad to see me, and his kindness made me feel doubly ashamed of my long neglect of him. Donald presently went up stairs to see the children. I noticed that the little servant had welcomed him as those are welcomed who in time of trouble or sickness bring an atmosphere of strength and comfort with them. Mr. Arkwright's care-worn face brightened when he saw Donald. When the latter had left the room Mr. Arkwright said:

"We owe a great debt of gratitude to Mr. Ayrlie, I assure you. He has been so good to my poor little children. My wife looks on him as a prodigy of medical skill, too. I dare say he may be. But I think she grounds her opinion on the fact of his having hunted through Horsingham to find some hot-house grapes for Mary. Poor Mary suffered the most of all the children. You should have seen the gratitude in her great, dark eyes when Mr. Ayrlie put a cool, pulpy grape to her lips. Patty naturally declares him to be a second *Æsculapius*." And the poor father laughed, while the tears trembled in his eyes. "But every one has been good to us," he continued—"every one. Of Dr. Hewson I don't know how to speak. He is what you have always known him, Miss Furness. Then there is that good creature, Alice Kitchen."

I told him that I had seen Alice, and that I was sorry to hear it rumored that she would inherit little or none of her grandfather's property.

Mr. Arkwright's face changed in a moment. He looked as though he were suffering from a twinge of bodily pain.

"Ah," said he, "old Green was a hard man—a hard man! I—I had some transactions with him. I—in fact, why should I disguise it?—I owed him money. It was not my fault. We have never been extravagant, and Patty is the best manager in the world. But I had sore need of a sum of money, Miss Furness, and I borrowed it of old Green. I hope—I think that Mr. Matthew Kitchen will be a little more considerate. Do you think he will be?"

I could not offer much comfort to Mr. Arkwright. I did not know what Matthew would do, but I had unpleasant forebodings.

"But," said he, with a sort of *weak eagerness* of manner which he showed sometimes, poor, sorely-trying man!—"but the sister is such a kindly, good creature, I am not really afraid that Mr. Matthew will be unreasonable. I am not, really!"

It seemed to me that the world had suddenly grown full of troubles. On every side there was anxiety and struggle. I said so to my

grandfather as we were walking back toward Mortlands.

"One use of our own troubles, Anne," said he, "is to discipline us to feel for others. Children and very young persons are frequently shallow and selfish, because they are unable from their own experience to imagine the sufferings of those around them."

"All children are not selfish, grandfather," said I. "Did you ever see any thing more thoughtful and good than poor little Lizzie Arkwright?"

I had been up stairs before leaving Wood Street, and had seen the five children. Lizzie, Martha, and Teddy were now convalescent, but they had none of them yet left their chamber. Lizzie was dressed, and was able to move about and attend to the others a little. She would have done more than her strength justified if she had not been checked. When I entered the nursery, as the children's sleeping-room was called, Lizzie was sitting on a wooden chair, heaped up with patchwork-covered cushions, so as to raise her to a sufficient height for her purpose, close beside Mary's crib, patiently turning over the leaves of a book full of gaudily colored pictures, to amuse the sick child's languid eyes. There were four small, narrow cribs of unpainted wood in the bare room. The four little girls slept here. The room was, fortunately, spacious and sufficiently airy. Teddy usually occupied a little attic, with a sloping roof, at the top of the house; but since his illness he had been brought down stairs to a little strip of a room next to his sisters', and which was absolutely unfurnished save for his tiny bed. Mrs. Arkwright and Donald were with Teddy when I entered the nursery. Grandfather was standing beside little Jane's crib, contemplating its small occupant with a benevolent face.

"How is Jane?" said I, addressing my grandfather.

"Oh, she'll do all right. She's getting on famously. Jane is a great deal better."

Jane slowly turned her bright, attentive eyes, which she had kept fixed on grandfather while he was speaking, toward me, and giving the oddest little ghost of one of her old emphatic nods—for Jane was too weak to make a vigorous gesture—observed, corroboratively, "'Es; Dane is a gate deal better."

I kissed the little creature, and she received my caress very graciously. They told me she had spoken of me and asked for me more than once. But she made no extravagant demonstrations of joy at seeing me; only she curled her wasted mite of a hand round my forefinger, and held me near her as long as I remained in the room.

"Miss Furness!" called out Mary, in her contralto tones, now very feeble and a little hoarse, "look at the pictures! ain't they beautiful? Blue Beard and Cinner—Cinnerella, and ever so many! Dr. Hewson gave it to me."

"Oh, it *is* beautiful, Mary! all the colors of the rainbow! Dr. Hewson is very good, is he not?"

There was a chorus of, "Oh yes! that he is!" and Teddy, hearing this through the half-open door of his room, joined in it with an enthusiastic "Hooray! He says I'm to have meat to-morrow! Hoo-ra-a-ay!"

Little Jane could not shout, but, not to be behindhand, she raised her head, and softly rubbed her cheek against the lappet of "Dr. Hewson's" rough great-coat, as he stood by the side of her crib. There was something in the innocent, confiding, baby action which brought the tears to my eyes. As I turned my head I saw Mrs. Arkwright and Donald standing side by side, in the doorway of Teddy's room, and looking on at the little scene.

I do not know whether a great painter could have rendered the extraordinary blending of feelings which was expressed in Mrs. Arkwright's face. There was gratitude to my grandfather, and trust in him, undoubtedly. And there was love for her children, and a kind of compassion for their sickness which was almost more fierce than tender, if I may say what sounds so strange. And there was the old yearning, grudging look, as though she were pained not to be *all* to the little ones, and were wrestling with her jealousy of those who were kind to them.

It lasted but an instant. She came forward and spoke to me much in her usual manner. And after my grandfather and Donald had assured her that the children were going on perfectly well, and the latter had promised to look in again that evening, we took our leave, and walked up the long High Street to Mortlands. And then it was that I told grandfather how it seemed to me that the world had suddenly grown full of troubles.

I would not prolong my stay at Mortlands beyond the next morning. I was very anxious to get home, and to talk of all I had heard of father's prospects with my mother. Grandfather said he would drive me to Water-Eardley himself. We set out immediately after an early breakfast. During the first part of our drive grandfather spoke chiefly of Donald. He praised him warmly, and said he showed great aptitude for his profession, as well as steady determination to study it. There was a large hospital at Horsingham, and grandfather said he thought this establishment would afford Donald opportunities of learning a great deal before it would be necessary for him to go to London. Suddenly, in the midst of this discourse, he asked, "How old are you, Anne?"

"Twenty, grandfather."

"H'm! You're very much of a child in some things for twenty. Ha! When is your birthday?"

"On the 17th of September."

"You will be twenty-one—of age, that is—on the 17th of next September?"

"Yes."

"I wish to Heaven we may induce your father to make a move from this place before the autumn."

After that grandfather fell into a musing silence, which lasted until we reached the gate at Water-Eardley.

Father was still in his room. We found mother tying up some geraniums in the window of the little morning-room. She was overjoyed to see her father, and we three had an earnest talk together.

"You've told Anne, then?" said my mother.

I understood well enough why she had preferred that he should tell me of their project rather than telling it me herself. She shrank from uttering any word that might seem to reflect on her husband. And yet, in some way, it was necessary that I should be made acquainted with the state of affairs. She was relieved to find that I knew it.

Grandfather asked her if she had said any thing to George about it lately, and she answered yes; and that he had really seemed to contemplate cutting himself loose from all the entanglements and temptations that bound him to Horsingham.

"Things must be *very* bad with him, to make him listen to the scheme," said my grandfather, thoughtfully.

Mother fired up, or, I might say, flickered up, for her wrath was very brief. "Poor dear George has been very unfortunate," she said. "It is not for *me* to blame him, at all events, for he has been led on and on from one loss to another in the hope of making money for me and Anne."

"Well, well, Lucy," said my grandfather, mildly, "if we can but convince him that gambling can do no good to any human creature, and that to go on in the hope of retrieving what he has lost is to follow the most treacherous will-o'-the-wisp that ever tempted men into bogs and quagmires, we may confess that good has come out of that evil."

He went on to urge that the change could not be made too soon; that delay must be unwise, and might be fatal; and that he thought George should take some preliminary step as to the giving up of the house and farm *at once*. Then by degrees he drew from mother the confession that George had promised to take some decisive measures next autumn. But that he had declared he must try to battle on until after the month of September. And that after that the sacrifice *might* not be necessary at all.

Grandfather put his hands to his head and gave a half-suppressed groan on hearing this. "Fatal, fatal, fatal!" he exclaimed. "Just what I feared. He has some scheme in his head that is to make his fortune, of course. Let him procrastinate! Give him time! Yes, yes; and at the end of the autumn, instead of being ankle-deep in the bog, he will be knee-deep, if not over head and ears!"

"My poor George!" said mother, with a

trembling lip and streaming eyes. "It is not for himself. He wants nothing for himself!"

"He wants what the drunkard wants, who takes brandy that he *knows* to be poison just as well as the whole College of Physicians."

"Oh, father, how can you speak so harshly? I can not hear such things said of George. I *ought* not."

It was a painful scene. All my reason and my conscience were on grandfather's side. But I felt my heart full of yearning compassion for my mother. I went to her, and took her in my arms, and laid her head on my shoulder. "Don't cry, mother," I said. "We will stay together, come what will, and help each other."

"I have done more harm than good by coming, it seems," said grandfather, looking at us sadly. But he had not done more harm than good.

That evening, when he was gone away, and afterward during many quiet hours, mother and I talked, and planned, and hoped, and gradually familiarized ourselves with the thought of leaving Water-Eardley. And I thought that if we thus became accustomed to the notion of dwelling on it, father would likewise grow used to it by hearing mother speak of it in her gentle, pleasant way, and with the woman's tact—made fine and keen by her great love—that taught her to cease from speaking when she perceived that her words became importunate.

Father, meanwhile, grew more affectionate in his manner; more considerate, more kind, more like his old self than I had seen him for many a day. Sometimes, when he looked at his wife's pale, worn, sweet face, his own would wear an expression of sorrowful tenderness, such as touched my very heart. But I knew that it was he who had traced lines upon my mother's anxious forehead, and prematurely robbed her fair skin of its healthy bloom. I had a way of *contemplating my own emotions* as though from a superior and exterior point of view, and I knew all this, and in a manner resented it, even while I was yielding to a tearful sympathy with my father, which, after all, did not go much deeper than a mere physical affection of my nerves.

I believe that there were times when my father deceived himself into a generous enthusiasm that fancied itself ready for self-sacrifice. He would talk even before me sometimes of his errors and his faults, and of the hope he had in the future. And he would say that poverty did not frighten him; if he could but be free from debt he should be content, only for his Lucy. And mother would take his hand and kiss it, and tell him that she feared nothing so that they were spared to each other; and would build pretty castles in the air, to be inhabited by him and her and me, which were like the edifices in a fairy story, with the gold and diamonds and precious stones left out. Oh me! oh me! How it all comes back again, the ghost of that time! With the ghosts of the heartaches that were real, and the hopes that

that superior and exterior *me* knew to be false! And the ghost of—not of a love, but the fancy of a love waited on by little fluttering fears and vanities—slight, light, frivolous little vanities that were really as afraid of the clear eyes of the contemplative conscience in me as a flock of hurrying, purposeless, dizzy bats would be of the sun at noontide.

And yet that was all a part of the life that I have lived. And even the gauzy-winged vanities have been touched with a grave twilight, for they have become "portions and parcels of the dreadful past."

Dreadful in its unchangeableness—in its irrevocableness; but yet not without a strange, sweet pathos to look back upon. For it seems to me sometimes that the past, like the long crystal streak above an autumn sunset, gives a solemn beauty to trivial things that stand revealed against its ineffable depths, as the little still twigs and leaflets of a tangled hedge show with a carven clearness upon the evening light.

There seemed to come a pause in our lives, like the lull on a tempestuous night when the wind ceases wearily for a while, and a smooth flood of silence rushes into one's ears and fills one's brain.

Gervase Lacer was often with us. Many an evening we sat around the fire, we four; sometimes talking, often silent. Dreaming, thinking, planning—what different dreams, thoughts, and plans! And thus the winter wore away, and the early spring, and the summer-time was at hand.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FROM the night of the famous ball there had been a feud between Sam Cudberry and his sister, and Mr. Lacer was the subject of it. Clementina was disposed to side with her brother, but Tilly and Henny were too strong for her. She had been used to submit to Tilly on certain points all her life, and the time for rebellion had not yet arrived—perhaps never would arrive.

Miss Cudberry announced to every one, whether it concerned them to know it or not, that Mr. Lacer was a low-bred, impertinent coxcomb. She was not troubled by any sense of shame at proclaiming her sudden change of opinion about him, nor did she hesitate to avow the cause of it. It was that he had failed to show her "proper attention at her ball." That was what she said, and, so far as it went, it was true. But there was another reason for her indignation and animosity; to wit, that Mr. Lacer had danced with me, and talked with me, and paid more attention to me in various ways than Miss Cudberry at all approved of.

"That's not what pa goes to the expense of a ball for!" exclaimed Tilly, with much bitterness. "Not for the purpose of having Anne Furness's head turned with conceit and vanity by *officers*! Though Mr. Lacer is but an ensign, he might know how to behave himself! But I

hear more about him than he perhaps guesses. And *if* his father wasn't a tavern-keeper at Ep-som, I stand open to correction, that's all! It is something new, I fancy, for Miss Cudberry of Woolling to be passed over in her own house by bar-men and pot-boys." All this and more was repeated to us by Sam Cudberry. He was resolved not to give up "his friend," as he called Mr. Lacer. At the same time, it was not easy to receive any guest at Woolling in Tilly's despite. Sam, therefore, honored Water-Eardley with his presence a good deal at this time. "I can see Lacer more comfortably here than at Woolling. And George gives a fellow a very decent glass of wine," said our cousin, with delightful frankness.

I wondered that he did not prefer seeing Mr. Lacer at Brookfield, which was nearer to his own house than Water-Eardley. But Sam did not leave me long in perplexity on this point. It appeared from his statement that Mr. Lacer's brother officers did not receive Sam with the courtesy and cordiality due to a Cudberry of Woolling. Sam had dined at the mess once, but pronounced the whole thing "deadly slow," and the officers of the gallant —th a set of beastly, stuck-up fools. *He* shouldn't go there any more. S. Cudberry, Junior, of Woolling, didn't need to go a-begging for a shabby dinner and a bottle of cheap wine. *He* knew where it came from, and what it cost!

I marveled greatly what these gentlemen could have said or done to make it so plain even to Sam's apprehension that his company was not welcome; and, further, to induce him to abstain from bestowing it on them whether they liked it or not. On my hinting this to Mr. Lacer he told me, with a half-smiling, half-vexed expression of countenance, that Sam had drunk so much and talked so much, on the occasion of his dining at mess, as to have given offense to several of the men present. I shuddered to think what Sam might be, with his weak brain heated by wine, and his tongue loosened, and his spirits raised with the notion of being in good company!

"You know, your cousin is peculiar in his manner, to say the least of it," observed Mr. Lacer.

"How dreadful for *you*!" I exclaimed. "He went as your guest, and you must have been greatly annoyed and mortified. But how did you contrive to make Sam understand that—that—you could never introduce him among your friends again?"

"Well, I—I simply told him so," said Mr. Lacer, with a kind of despairing gesture, which suggested to my mind how many tentatives at conveying the truth with some delicacy must have been tried and failed before he had recourse to that strong measure.

"Of course it was a most unpleasant thing to do," he proceeded. "But Cudberry is so—so odd, so utterly unlike other people, that I had to come to that, and I managed it somehow. At first he said that if he had said any thing

unpleasant to any of the fellows he wasn't above calling on them and apologizing. He supposed he had had a glass too much. Very sorry. Couldn't be helped. He would make it all square! But I knew that would never do. And, fortunately, the next day he met the colonel in the streets of Brookfield, who cut him dead. So he turned round, and was very wroth, and declared they were a set of snobs, and he would never go near them again."

And in this manner it came to pass that Sam Cudberry was often at Water-Eardley in the bright summer weather. He stuck to Mr. Lacer like a leech. Father neither encouraged nor discouraged him, but just endured his presence with the apathetic tolerance which had grown upon him lately. Mr. Lacer's indulgence for Sam frequently surprised me. He endured him not only with patience, but with good-humor; and Sam very frequently passed the bounds of civility when he was disposed to be witty and humorous.

One day when Sam had been talking to me of Mr. Lacer after the fashion of his family—partly patronizing, as being the friend of a Cudberry of Woolling, and partly contemptuous, as being a stranger outside the charmed circle of the Cudberry connection, and as being, moreover, *absent* at the moment—I was moved to say to him with some heat, "You ought to be very grateful to Mr. Lacer, I think, Sam. He is very kind and good-natured to you always, and you are not always as courteous to him as you might be!"

Sam looked at me fixedly, grinned slowly, letting his mouth expand by degrees, winked, and then said, "Why, you don't suppose I'm such a flat as to think it's all for my sweet sake, do you?"

A conscious feeling kept me silent, and I felt my face grow hot and red. Sam, however, went on to say something that I did not at all expect.

"Lacer knows that I ain't as green as grass. He's found out that I'm up to a thing or two; keep my eyes open, and move with the times. My governor's a little too much of the old school—he wasn't born yesterday, as he says. I don't tell him every thing. No good stroking him the wrong way; but fair play's a jewel, you know. 'Honor among thieves,' eh? As long as Lacer don't split on me, I don't split on him; so there's no particular gratitude in the case, Miss Anne."

Sam concluded with a prolonged chuckle, and many nods and winks.

I was a good deal annoyed by all this. That Sam should desire to keep many of his actions secret from his father did not at all surprise me. He was almost entirely dependent on Uncle Cudberry during his life, and could not afford to displease him. All this he had doubtless been obliging enough to confide to Mr. Lacer—or part of it; for Sam had a queer, cunning secretiveness of character, which seemed never to abandon him even in his most boisterous and

convivial moments. But what Mr. Lacer could have confided to Sam that should give the latter any power over him I was at a loss to conjecture.

Finally, I came to the conclusion that it was very foolish to attach any importance to Sam Cudberry's utterances. But its being foolish did not prevent me from dwelling on his words in my own mind.

Suddenly, one day, I remembered what Alice Kitchen had said of the rumor that Mr. Lacer was about to leave the army. Could it be true? And if so, was that what Sam was alluding to? And yet why keep it secret? Mr. Lacer was on such intimate terms with my father that I thought he would be sure to know the truth, and I asked him: "Father, do you know whether Mr. Lacer means to leave the army?"

"Did he say any thing to you about it?" said my father, asking a counter-question.

"To me? Oh no! But I heard it rumored."

"Yes; I believe it is true. He will sell out if he can."

"I wonder why?"

"He isn't happy in his regiment; his colonel is a stiff, puritanical, canting old fellow, and he makes it unpleasant for him."

"But," said I, after a long pause, during which my father, who was smoking an after-dinner cigar in the garden, pulled out a queer little pocket-book with clasps, and began making figures on it with a pencil—"but, father, could he not exchange into another regiment, instead of leaving the army altogether?"

"One thousand to twenty-five, or say half a point less—eh? Oh, don't bother me, Anne; there's a good girl! Yes; I don't know. I suppose he's sick of the service."

It was not very long after this that Mr. Lacer came into mother's sitting-room with a newspaper in his hand. "There," said he, "Mrs. Furness, is my order of release."

He gave her the *Gazette*, and she read in it, and I read over her shoulder, that Ensign Gervase Lacer was permitted to retire by the sale of his commission.

"You do not seem much surprised," said he, looking first at mother and then at me. We told him that we had been prepared for this news for some time; but that, as he had kept his own counsel so closely, we had not ventured to speak of it to him. Even now mother refrained from asking him any questions. He presently went out into the garden to get her some flowers she wanted to fill a vase with that stood on the little table near the window. The window was wide open, and Mr. Lacer, coming back with the flowers in his hand, leaned with both elbows on the sill, and began to speak of himself and his prospects. I was working near the window, my mother arranging her nosegay. The sunshine slanted into the room; the lowing of cattle came up from a distant field; every thing seemed still and peaceful; and Mr. Lacer stood there, at the open window, like a portrait in its frame, and spoke in a low voice, dropping out

almost unconnected sentences one after the other, more as if he were talking to himself than to us.

"I should have told you long ago, Mrs. Furness. You have been so good to me, and I have such a regard for you, that I should have felt it right to tell you, if I had told any one; but I kept my own counsel, because—because I was not sure that I should succeed. It has been a troublesome matter in some ways. Two years ago—a year ago—I should not have cared about going to India, or the Cape, or any where else; they might have sent me to Sierra Leone for all I should have cared about the matter *then*. Now I find the idea of being ordered abroad very terrible. But I couldn't stay at home just for wishing it. I was obliged to try and see some chance before me, if I remained in England and left the army, of getting bread and cheese. I'm not a rich man, you know, Mrs. Furness, though I'm the only son of a wealthy father. Some day, I suppose, I shall be well provided for. Let Mrs. Lacer grasp as she will, she can hardly rob me of all my inheritance, and she has no children of her own. Well, I thought I saw a chance—a hope; I worked it all out by myself. Yesterday I wrote to my father, to tell him that the business is concluded. So it is of no use his remonstrating."

"Oh, I hope," said mother, and then stopped and raised her soft eyes to the young man's face. His eyes were cast down, and he was picking a crimson flower to pieces, petal by petal, as he still leaned with his arms on the window-sill. "My dear Mr. Lacer," mother proceeded, "since you speak so openly to me, you won't mind my saying that I hope you have not acted rashly in resigning your commission. Will your father approve of your having done so? Of course I do not pretend to dictate to you. You must know your own affairs best. Only I do hope you have well considered the matter."

"Oh yes," said Mr. Lacer, rather slowly, and in an absent manner. "Yes, yes, I could not do otherwise."

"Mrs. and Miss Cudberry of Woolling," announced the maid-servant, opening the door of the sitting-room at this moment.

I believe we all looked scared; I am sure I felt so. Mr. Lacer started and took his elbows from the window-sill, as Mrs. and Miss Cudberry rustled into the room.

The door precisely faced the open window; so that the first object which Tilly beheld, as she bounced in, a pace behind her mother, was Mr. Lacer's head and shoulders, framed, as I have said, in the window opposite. Mr. Lacer took his hat off. Tilly made a bow, the like of which, I should think, had never been seen by him; for he stared in genuine astonishment. It was a writhing movement of her whole body, accompanied by a rapid semicircular sweep of her head, which she finally turned away from him over her shoulder. When Mrs. Cudberry saw Mr. Lacer, which she did the moment aft-

er having shaken hands with my mother, she made a hesitating movement, as though she would have gone to the window and shaken hands with him, but Tilly undisguisedly pulled her sleeve, and detained her.

"I think I'll go in search of your father, Miss Furness," said Mr. Lacer to me. (I was seated close to the window, as I have said, and I had not left it, although I rose when Aunt Cudberry came into the room.) "He said he would have a stroll and a cigar with me in the riverside meadows by-and-by." Then he added rapidly, speaking almost in a whisper, "What on earth is the matter with Miss Cudberry of Woolling? She all but cut me! What have I done?"

I shook my head, and made a little sign that I could not speak just then; and he smiled, slightly shrugged his shoulders, and walked away down the garden path, having first bestowed on Miss Cudberry a most elaborate and exaggerated bow, of which she took no notice.

"So you've got him here, my dear!" said Aunt Cudberry, seating herself all aslant in an arm-chair, and squeezing her face into a strange complicated grimace.

"Got *him* here?" repeated my mother, interrogatively.

"Got that Mr. Lacer, my dear. Ah, well, I don't know, I'm sure! I hear all sort of things; but I sometimes don't know what to think—really and truly I don't!"

That Aunt Cudberry did not know what to think on many subjects was not so astonishing a statement as she appeared to deem it was. My mother made no reply; and Tilly, who had been talking to me in a more sharp and dictatorial manner than usual, broke in with an animated tirade against Mr. Lacer. She was very voluble, and very bitter. My mother kept casting imploring glances at me to bespeak my forbearance. I said no word; neither did Mrs. Cudberry nor my mother; so Tilly talked uninterruptedly until she was tired.

"Tilly is a little severe, poor thing!" said Aunt Cudberry, deprecatingly, when her daughter paused.

"Now, ma!" cried Tilly, in a warning voice. "None of that, ma! No shifting it all on me, Mrs. Cudberry, if *you* please! You know I speak the family feeling, and the family opinion. And if you like to see your only son enticed on to his ruin, pa doesn't, and my sisters don't, and I don't. So pray say nothing about severity, ma."

This was a new turn; and I could not refrain from asking her what she meant by Mrs. Cudberry seeing her "only son enticed to ruin." Tilly satisfied my curiosity with the greatest alacrity. Her statement, given with much energy and superfluous expenditure of words, amounted to this: Sam Cudberry had become very intimate with Mr. Lacer. It was supposed that Sam had entered into some racing speculations—on a small scale for the pres-

ent, it was true, but dangerous as a beginning of gambling. As Sam had never exhibited any taste of the kind before, it must be attributed to the influence of his new friend. Mr. Lacer was known to frequent race-courses. Sam and he were often together. They had been seen driving together on mysterious expeditions, no one knew whither, in the neighborhood of W—, the county town. Mr. Lacer was not in good odor with his brother officers. He owed money in Brookfield, and his father was not a gentleman, but a tavern-keeper.

"How, in the name of wonder, did you glean all this gossip?" asked my mother, looking quite bewildered; for, as I have said, I give only a compressed and unadorned version of Tilly's copious discourse, enriched with numberless circumstantial trivialities.

"I made it my business to pick up all the information I could about the person Lacer," rejoined Tilly, unblushingly. "He has been spied upon more than he thinks for. And so has Sam. Sam is close and cunning, but he don't hoodwink Miss Cudberry. I shall teach him not to trample on his own family."

Finally, she brought out as a climax the information that Mr. Lacer had been "turned out of the army."

"My dear Tilly," said my mother, gently, "I am glad to be able to assure you that you are mistaken there."

"Not a bit of it, Mrs. George! I supposed he hadn't told *you*, but it's true for all that!"

In vain we tried to explain to her that there was no disgrace in an officer selling his commission. She shook her head obdurately. "Ah, it's all very well," she observed; "but he only retired in time to prevent being turned out, *if* he wasn't turned out. I have warned you, Mrs. George. I thought it my duty to warn you. And especially to warn Anne. I wish I could have seen my cousin George. I should have begged him as a favor not to encourage Sam here. I know what he comes for. It is to meet that man. I believe he's a black-ball—no; what do they call it?—a black-leg! As to my cousin George himself—"

"Po-o-or George!" murmured Mrs. Cudberry.

"It's of no use saying any thing on *that* score!"

Mrs. Cudberry, I suppose, was able to read the expression of my mother's face better than her daughter was. Or perhaps she had some sympathy with her nephew's wife. She was not by nature nearly so hard and unfeeling as Tilly. At all events, she checked Miss Cudberry's further utterances decisively, by rising to go away. For with Tilly, as with many other people, the announcement that it was "no use saying any thing" on this or that subject, was the pretty sure prelude to her talking about it with peculiar loquacity.

When they were gone at last, mother sat back wearily in her chair, and was silent for some time. After a prolonged pause she said:

"Oh me, how glad I should be if it were over, and we were away out of all this talk and turmoil! I hope it is not selfish to wish it. But I do believe your dear father would be happier—*really* happier—even in quite poverty, provided we could have a little peace, and look the world in the face."

That evening Sam Cudberry came as usual. We had told my father of Tilly's words, but he answered shortly and sharply that we might find something better to do than to repeat such nonsense; that Sam was his own master; and that he (father) would receive what guests he chose without asking for the approval or caring for the disapproval of any one.

And so things continued as they were for some time longer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It proved to be quite true that old Mr. Green had left all his property to his grandson Matthew. For once gossip and rumor had been correct as to the main fact, although the amount of the old coach-maker's wealth had been exaggerated in some instances, and in others understated. The truth was that he left behind him a sum sufficient to have enabled Matthew Kitchen to live in comfort for the rest of his days without working, had he been so minded, besides the "good-will" of the coach-making business, and a valuable stock in trade. It soon appeared, however, that Matthew's greed or ambition was not yet satisfied. He showed no symptoms of giving up business. On the contrary, he had the work-shops and all the premises enlarged, and was solicitous for new orders. He removed with his family to a smart house, newly furnished in the gaudiest style Mrs. Matthew Kitchen could achieve, and bade fair to become one of the most prosperous among his fellow-townsmen.

Neither Alice nor her father inherited a farthing. "Father's foreman, Miss Anne," said Alice to me. "And a good workman he is, as Mat knows. And Mat kindly keeps him on; and has even raised his wage ten shillings a week. It's wonderful kind of Mat, isn't it?" Then, with a sudden change of manner: "Why, you don't suppose he'd have done that much but for father saying—and it was true enough too—that he could get more money from Hobson's, of Brookfield, and threatening to go. I put father up to it. He was that cast down and disappointed at the will, as he'd have given up altogether if I'd have let him. But no. Mat, he says it's very sinful to bear a grudge against the dead on account of a bit of filthy lucre. And he's always a-throwing Scripture texts in your teeth. So I says to father, now it's no good our cutting off our noses to spite our faces, that's certain sure. But, again, where's the need to stand and be kicked? We bear no grudge. Well and good. But you aren't being paid a foreman's wage, and that

you know, father. And though you might work for poor pay for Grandfather Green, that's no reason you should do the same for Mat. So you just go and say, 'The laborer is worthy of his hire,' and tell him you must have a rise. Don't you let Mat draw you into arguing, but stick to your text—he's fond enough of texts—and says you, 'The laborer is worthy of his hire, and Hobson's is willing to give it!'"

I heard afterward that Selina complained that her husband's father was "so grasping," and that Matthew had enough to do to satisfy old Kitchen and Alice, who fancied that because they had been left out of the will, poor Matthew was bound to find them in the fat of the land. And she, also, was in the habit of drawing an instructive moral from the family history; demanding of her hearers what could they expect when old Kitchen and Alice had flown in the face of Providence by having a lodger who went to the races, and moreover made unto themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; by which phrase (unintelligible to Selina's comprehension, and therefore made to do duty whenever she wished to be impressive) Mrs. Matthew Kitchen intended to allude to Alice's intimacy in Mr. Arkwright's poverty-stricken home, and her kindness to his sick little children.

I had an unexpected opportunity of hearing Mrs. Matthew's sentiments from her own lips, for one day my father came into the little sitting-room at home, and informed my mother and myself that he wished us to "call on young Kitchen's wife."

"To—call—on—Selina?" repeated my mother, as though she could scarcely believe her ears. Father seized the opportunity to be hot and out of humor. He was ashamed of the request he was making, and took refuge in anger. He had never told mother of his money transactions with old Green; and the longer he delayed the revelation the more difficult it became. She was thoroughly perplexed and startled; and when father had dashed out of the room in a fit of temper—more than three-quarters feigned—she followed him hastily, to hide her tears from me, as I too well knew.

Before she could be induced to pay the visit, however, it must have been necessary to acquaint her with my father's motives for desiring it, or, at all events, to give her some strong reason for his extraordinary request. My mother's feelings were wrung, and her fortitude sorely tried by it. Does the reader despise her therefore? For my part, although the sacrifice was, for various reasons of temperament and education, a much smaller one to me than to her, I could not but admire and pity her in this circumstance. For such efforts there is no stimulus of excitement, no sense of the heroic, no sympathetic appreciation, to lighten their dead weight of mean commonplace.

Poor mother! Her life had latterly been largely made up of the like flat and depressing fulfillments of irksome duty. For myself, I had

no belief in the efficacy of the step my father had bidden us take. That Matthew Kitchen's pride would be flattered by it I did not doubt. But if my father supposed that any such piece of flattery would avail to loosen Mat's tight grip of his debtor, or to coax him into patience for a day longer than patience fully suited his convenience, my father was, I was persuaded, fatally mistaken. However, it was not my part to add to mother's distress by hinting this opinion to her, and I, of course, refrained from discouraging her.

We paid our visit, and passed twenty soul-depressing minutes in Matthew Kitchen's gaudily furnished parlor, that smelled like an upholsterer's shop, and looked like a room in a child's baby-house seen through a magnifying glass. There was the same incongruity of color, the same varnished brightness and air of unsubstantial fragility which one observes in a box of toys.

And there sat Selina, in uncompromising flesh and blood, looking more than ordinarily heavy and massive by contrast with her surroundings. Selina was troubled by no bashful misgivings. She received her former mistress with perfect self-satisfaction. It was my mother who was nervous and anxious, and conscious of being in a false position.

"How is Alice?" I asked, in a hopeless pause, which mother seemed incapable of breaking. I had not inquired for Selina's husband or child, feeling, in truth, no interest in either, and being determined to affect none. It was, I grant, a childish way of indemnifying myself for my enforced visit, and, as a means of piercing Selina's thick wrapping of phlegmatic self-complacency, utterly ineffectual.

"Oh, Alice is very well. She is always strong, it seems to me. But me and Alice ain't such friends as might be, you know. Alice has took it amiss poor dear grandfather's leaving his money as he did."

"I think it natural she should be disappointed. But Alice seems to me to bear her lot with wonderful cheerfulness and good temper."

"Of course you don't see the matter in a sperritule light," rejoined Selina, coolly.

I was not quite childish enough to undo all that our visit had been meant to do by any sharpness of retort. Little as I believed in the usefulness of the effort that poor mother had been urged to make, I understood very well that it did not become me to mar all hope of a good result by winding up our visit in a quarrel with Selina. I held my peace, therefore, and Mrs. Matthew Kitchen proceeded to pour forth in a steady, equable, sluggish stream, a great many complaints of her sister-in-law's conduct—chiefly referable to a lack of *sperrituality*. Alice's acquaintance with the Arkwrights was animadverted on, as though it had been openly disgraceful to the family of the Kitchens. Presently the true reason for this bitterness came out. Selina had too little conception of the existence of high thoughts or sentiments to en-

deavor to gloze over her own groveling motives. It is true that she had a few cant phrases of religion on her lips, but they were almost utterly meaningless to her, and she had not the remotest notion of making them a rule of life.

It appeared that Selina had been moved by a social jealousy of her sister-in-law's new acquaintance to make some advances to Mrs. Arkwright, which had signally failed. The exact particulars of the failure I never learned. But it was not difficult to conceive that Mrs. Arkwright's uncompromising and bitter sincerity should not have smoothed itself to please Mrs. Mat Kitchen. Moreover, Mrs. Arkwright was proud *for her husband*, and would not have tolerated for an instant any assumption of equality on the part of the ex-servant-maid. Hence Matthew and his wife hated the Arkwrights.

I shall never forget the sensation of misery with which I sat in that glaring parlor, the sun streaming hotly in at the window, a French clock ticking loudly on the mantel-piece, and Selina brassily staring at mother and me. The house was so still, and the street so unfrequented, that in the pauses of speech, and through the regular beat of the time-piece, I could hear Selina's stays creak as she breathed, and her gown rustle. The whole thing was maddening. There was so little excuse that could have been put into words for the nervous irritation I was feeling; and yet it was terribly real. When mother rose to go away, I fancied that I could not have endured two minutes more of it, had she protracted our visit by even that short space of time.

"Go to Mortlands," said mother, leaning wearily back in the pony-chaise; and thither we were driven. We hardly uttered a word to each other on the way. What was there to be said? There were ludicrous elements enough in our call on Mrs. Matthew Kitchen; but we were neither of us in a mood to relish them.

Mother walked through the shady garden, and entered by the glass door the dining-room at Mortlands. The room was cool and quiet, and fragrant with the scent of flowers which was blown in from the garden by the gentlest of little fluttering breezes, that seemed too lazy and luxurious to fly far. Tib had been dead many a year, but there was a successor to Tib—one of a long line of successors—in the shape of a slate-colored Skye terrier, whose bright eyes looked out mysteriously from a mop of hair. "Whose bright eye looked out," I should say; for one orb was usually hopelessly obscured by a habit he had of holding his head on one side, and thus causing his thick mane to hang askew. Roger Bacon (that was the slate-colored terrier's name) lazily arose on our entrance, lazily approached mother, lazily gave her hand a perfunctory lick, and lazily lay down again on the carpet with his tail thumping a lazy welcome on the floor, and his uneclipsed eye beaming mildly.

A thought came into my head as I looked at

him, of how unequally and incomprehensibly happiness is meted out to one and another in this world. "Oh, Roger Bacon," said I to myself, "it is surely for no merit of yours that you are my grandfather's dog, while your four-footed fellow-mortals are kicked and starved, so many of them! 'Conduct makes fate,' forsooth; and does not fate make conduct? and what a snappish, ill-conditioned cur might you not have been, O Roger, if your character had been formed on a discipline of ten kicks to one bone, and that one marrowless!"

Grandfather's entrance interrupted my sage reflections. We must stay and have tea with him, he said, and drive home by the light of the harvest-moon, now nearly at the full. Mother did not refuse. She had intended to pass the remainder of the afternoon at Mortlands. I believe she took that indulgence as part payment for her visit to Selina; although perhaps she did not plainly acknowledge this to herself.

I wandered out into the dear old garden, leaving my mother and grandfather to talk uninterruptedly. They confided in me fully, I knew; but I knew also that if, in the first surprise of learning to whom we had been paying a ceremonious visit that afternoon, grandfather should let fall some hot word of blame against his daughter's husband, *she* would rather that no one were by to hear it.

I went out at the glass door, and then, by a little path in the shrubbery, to the kitchen, where Keturah was elbow-deep in flour, and Eliza and Mrs. Abram were stoning raisins. Mrs. Abram had a large white apron of Keturah's covering the front of her skirt, and another tied under her chin. She reminded me of the glimpses I had had into a barber's shop on Saturday afternoons when I used to be brought from school to spend my holiday in grandfather's house. She was glad to see me, and I was glad to see her. The grotesqueness of her red visage, surmounting the white bib, did not alter that.

When I had spoken a few words to the three women I went out again, and paced about the well-known paths, and then sat down, elbow on knee, and chin in hand, on a sloping, grass-covered bank surmounted by a privet hedge, and basked in the sunshine, and steeped my soul in the peace of the past years, that seemed to come back to me in that garden.

Presently Donald was at my side. I scarcely knew how he had come. I was aware of his footstep, and of his greeting, and of his sitting down beside me, as a sleepy brain is aware of outside things, struggling to hold fast by slumber, unwilling to stir an eyelid lest broad work-a-day daylight should rout the last flickering image of its dream. But it was not long before Donald himself slid into my reverie, or rather he shared it. We talked in half sentences, remembering this or that incident of our childish days: a hint—a broken phrase—sufficing to recall whole histories, as such slight

things do suffice to people who hold a score of common memories. We avoided all allusion to the present: it was as though we stood on a little, flowery, fairy island, round which the sea of time was rolling and foaming, and which would be swallowed up anon, and we must take to our ships again, and say good-by to the green islet, and steer on our course, through storm and shine, as best we might. But, meanwhile— There was a brief, sweet "meanwhile" when we rested amidst grass and flowers and the trickling sound of sweet water. I dwell on those moments. I linger over them; over the childish recollections, strengthened and made vivid by the sight and scent of the old herbs and plants (there was my friend, the flame-colored nasturtium, bright and hot as of yore); over the tea-drinking in the quiet dining-room; over the flavor of Keturah's dainty cakes, and the fragrance of the steaming tea, and the murmur of Mrs. Abram's inarticulate voice; over the drive homeward, through the moonlight, in which journey grandfather and Donald accompanied us, purposing to walk back to Mortlands; over the pleasant quiet chat, and not less pleasant dreamy silence, as we rolled smoothly along the high-road, through the regularly recurring shadows of the great elm-trees, and out again into yellow moonlight spaces; over all these I linger, for they were our last moments of peace and rest to the spirit for many a long day.

CHAPTER XXV.

HAS the reader forgotten Dodd, my father's groom in the days before Flower had brought his bow-legs to Water-Eardley? (Flower, be it noted, was rarely brought any whither *by* his legs, having a constitutional antipathy to walking.)

If the reader has forgotten Dodd, I had not forgotten him. My recollection had not, however, been refreshed by seeing him very often since he left my father's service. Once or twice he called at Mrs. Lane's house while I was at school, and had left for me a present of apples from his own orchard. Dodd was, as I have said, the landlord of a way-side public house, and was doing well.

He had not yet given a landlady to the hostelry of the Royal Oak. I used to fancy sometimes that he had entertained an unrequited attachment for Selina, who had been buxom, and bright-eyed, and pink-and-white enough to pass for quite a belle in her own class. But then again I recalled sundry sayings of Dodd's, which seemed to contradict such a supposition, by reason of the clear-sighted appreciation of Selina's hard and selfish nature which they evinced.

Howbeit, Dodd, having attained to a mature age, resolved to look out for a wife. His circle of female acquaintance was limited, I suppose, or else none of the damsels in his own neigh-

borhood happened to please him, for to whom should he come a-wooing but to Alice Kitchen! There seemed to me to be considerable fitness in the notion of Alice as landlady of a country inn. Dodd had made her acquaintance years ago, when she had been a very young girl with a crop of light brown curls and a blue bead necklace. But even in those days her notable housewifery and active industry must have made an impression on the mind of the prudent Dodd. It might appear as though—old Green's will having removed Alice from the category of eligible young women "with expectations"—his coming forward at this time argued considerable generosity of sentiment. But I believe that Dodd rightly judged Alice's thrift, and stout, serviceable good temper, warranted to stand any amount of wear and tear, and skill in cooking, and general brisk handiness, to constitute a very desirable *tocher* in themselves; whereas, had she been old Green's heiress, he might have been shy of aspiring to her.

I heard of this courtship from the servants at Mortlands, who were deep in Alice's confidence. And the subject on old Keturah's lips, oddly enough, led to her telling me something which seemed to furnish a key to the puzzling advertisement I had seen in the sporting paper.

Dodd, she said, declared that Mr. Sam Cudberry had latterly haunted the neighborhood of the Royal Oak. He did not frequent that tavern, although he had once or twice called for a draught of ale there; but he was constantly seen in its vicinity. Generally, as Dodd heard, Sam was accompanied by another gentleman—a stranger to the village. But this last-named person had never entered the Royal Oak, nor had he been seen by its landlord. But the gist of Dodd's statement was the expression of his suspicion that Mr. Sam Cudberry had got into a "dangerous line," and that he was making stealthy visits to a certain private training-ground, which, Dodd affirmed, existed not many miles from the Royal Oak, in the direction of the Brookfield Road.

"But," said I, "what harm will it do Mr. Sam Cudberry to visit a private training-ground, even if this be true?"

Harm enough, according to Keturah. No one would have been admitted to such a place without either having some share in the business carried on there, or being very deep in the confidence of the people who had a share in it. There was nothing in the world—"unless it might be coining false money," said Keturah—that was conducted with such jealous secrecy as the training of a race-horse. "And," said she, in conclusion, "what good can come to such a one as Mr. Sam Cudberry by getting into that sort of company? He's cunning, and close, and greedy of money, and a fool! There's cunning fools, Miss Anne, as many as simple ones. Even a fool can't go far wrong so long as he keeps honest; but as for Mr. Sam—" A prolonged shake of the head, and compres-

sion of the lips, significantly finished Keturah's speech.

Was, then, Sam Cudberry the advertiser who desired a "gentlemanlike *confederate*" with capital? On consideration it appeared unlikely that he should originate such a scheme; but far from improbable that he had entered into it with some bolder or more practiced "confederate," to use the term of the advertisement.

I do not profess to have felt much anxiety on Sam's account, or much heed whether he got into mischief or no. I should, at another time, have thought of Aunt Cudberry with some sympathy; and, in a lesser degree, of my father's probable vexation on his cousin's account; for father preserved, against all sorts of discouragement, a kind of clannish family feeling—which, in truth, was the only Cudberry trait I knew in him. But as it was, my heart was too full of carking fears and cares to have room for any lesser lukewarm sentiments of sympathy with my second cousins at Woolling. I thought very frequently, and very anxiously, of Dodd's revelation, it is true; but my thoughts and anxieties were for another than Sam.

I had dreamed day-dreams—*voluntary* dreams, so to speak—about Gervase Lacer. My mind was in a strange, vague, incoherent state with regard to him. There were times when my imagination pictured him as a man of warm heart and noble impulses, who had fought manfully against the evil influences of his youth; as one who was sincere and candid to a fault, and, moreover, strangely unmindful of self. This same imagination conjured up numberless scenes and circumstances in which I was ready to make almost any sacrifice for his happiness, or in which I was able to enhance it without any sacrifice at all; scenes and circumstances that showed me myself in fullest sympathy with Gervase, admiring him, believing in him, grateful to him, loving him. But at the bottom of my heart there was all the while a sense of unreality. They were *voluntary* dreams, as I have said, which did not take possession of me, but which I fostered and brooded over as I had done over fairy stories in my childish days.

Then, again, came periods of reaction, when I was distrustful of Gervase, and disposed to be disdainful of his intellectual shortcomings. Not that he was dull, or that he spoke foolishly; but there was nothing in his mind—or I had not discovered it—to which I could look up; there were some traits in it on which I undoubtedly looked *down*. And consciously to do this latter was extremely painful to me, and gave me an indescribable feeling of humiliation, I scarcely knew why.

But, apart from these fluctuations of feeling, I had strong reason to think anxiously of Mr. Lacer. He had grown thoroughly confidential with mother and me on the subject of my father. In speaking to her he softened matters a little, having abundance of tact, and great quickness in perceiving what sort of impres-

sion he was making. And he had, too, a winning way of disarming antagonism whenever he had chanced to arouse it. But in talking to me he had long thrown off all disguise as to my father's miserable fault. From him I learned much of the perilous state of our money affairs. He was aware of the fact of my mother's marriage settlement. He had once very slightly alluded to it in speaking to me. But although that stood between us and literal beggary, it scarcely rendered my father's fortunes less desperate.

Mr. Lacer confirmed my idea that he had influenced father's mind to acquiesce in the scheme of giving up Water-Eardley, and going away from all the temptations and connections that haunted its neighborhood. At least he so far confirmed it as not to deny it when I told him that I was sure it must be so, and thanked him for having given the advice of a true friend.

All this had been well. And even his indulgent toleration of Sam Cudberry's frequent companionship, which, I confess, vexed me, was accounted for by his (Gervase Lacer's) unwillingness to be harsh or cold to one of my father's kin. The reasons which Sam had given for his new friend's good-nature I had made no scruple of entirely disbelieving, well knowing that self-interest, in one shape or another, was the sole motive Sam was capable of attributing for any line of conduct deliberately pursued by sane persons.

But now Dodd's statement awoke a certain uneasiness within me. Half-formed conjectures flitted through my mind—suspicions I was ashamed of, but which would not be reasoned down. I had observed, too, recently, a growing air of preoccupation and anxious thoughtfulness in Mr. Lacer, and in my father a feverish restlessness and fluctuation of spirits. They spoke together almost furtively; and if I chanced to come upon them in the garden, as they strolled up and down smoking their cigars, they would almost invariably suspend their talk at my approach; and father sometimes even ordered me to go away, and not interrupt "business." As to Sam Cudberry, he would at such times markedly separate himself from my father and Gervase Lacer. He (Sam) was very frequently at Water-Eardley, and very frequently, also, he made one amidst the smokers in the garden—being supplied with cigars at my father's expense; but so surely as my father and Lacer began any discussion in a low voice, and my father pulled out the little note-book and pencil I have before alluded to, so surely did Sam withdraw himself to a distant part of the garden, or return to the house, where he would sit smoking at the open window, and bestowing his society on mother and me. It seemed to me almost as if Sam ostentatiously showed that he chose to keep himself apart from these conferences; for it was, of course, impossible, with my knowledge of him, to suppose that his conduct was dictated by any delicacy, or fear

of intruding where he was not wanted. I, having always in my mind what Dodd had said, resolved to try Sam on this point.

"You have left father and Mr. Lacer to their own devices," said I to him on one of the occasions I have alluded to.

Sam blew a cloud of smoke out of the window of mother's sitting-room, and answered, with a grin, "Well, yes; 'tain't the first time either. They'll get on all right without me."

"I suppose so."

"All right, or all wrong, *I* ain't a-going to plunge into their confidence."

"Are you not pretty deep in it already?" said I, with purposely exaggerated significance.

Sam looked at me cunningly. He did not seem startled—he had too much of his father's phlegm to be easily disconcerted—but he certainly showed surprise.

"Not a bit of it," he returned, after a short pause. "I might if I liked; but I'm awake. I keep on the safe side of the hedge. I don't mean it to come to father's ears as Cudberry, junior, of Woolling, has been burning his fingers with any gambling games. I keep clear of it all. Every body here can bear witness—you can bear witness that I do. I've showed it open enough on purpose."

"Do you remember our servant Dodd?" I asked, abruptly.

"Dodd? Yes, to be sure! He keeps a public between here and Diggleton's End, on the London road."

"I know he does. It is called the Royal Oak, not *very* far from Brookfield. You go there sometimes."

This time Sam stared at me outright.

"Why," said he, opening his eyes and thrusting out his lips, "he's never gone and told you?"

"Dodd, do you mean?"

Sam's mouth stretched itself into a grin, and he bestowed one of his favorite winks on me. "Ah!" he exclaimed, with a sort of sigh. "To be sure! Dodd, do I mean? Oh, of course! Who else, eh? That's a good un. Oh, you're deuced 'cute, Anne, and no mistake!"

"No; Dodd did not tell me. I heard it accidentally."

"Oh, you're awfully sharp! Blessed if I ain't afraid of you, Miss Anne! Or should be if I minded it's being known where I go; but you see I *don't* mind a brass farthing! It's for others to mind, not me. But fair play's a jewel, as I always say, and when I make a bargain I stick to it—specially when it's a jolly good bargain, all profit and no loss."

And hereupon Sam threw up his head, and roared with laughter at his own humor, uttering sounds so discordant that they might have proceeded from the throat of his sister Tilly herself.

This was all enigmatical enough, and did not tend to dissipate my uneasiness. Mother continued to urge my father as strongly as she dared to take some steps for giving up Water-Eardley. Debts were accumulating with dread-

ful quickness, ready money for the merest necessities was rarely forthcoming, and we began to experience what it is to be dunned by surly tradesmen. Our distance from Horsingham protected us somewhat. A man could not spare a whole morning from his business to come to Water-Eardley and ask for his money in person very often. But scarcely a post came without bringing one or two urgent requests for the payment of outstanding bills. And mother at last shrank so from encountering our creditors that she dreaded going into Horsingham at all. Still, to all representations that could be made to him father replied, "Wait till September. After September I shall look about me seriously, and make a move, if necessary—if necessary." He varied from sanguine hope to gloomy despair about his prospects. But in either or any mood he clung to his resolution of waiting until September, and could not be induced to make the smallest effort in the priceless present.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"It is not for me to betray confidence," said Mr. Lacer, coloring.

"Betray confidence! Surely not. But I have told you that my cousin expressly declared that he cared not a jot who knew of his goings and comings. You have betrayed nothing. It was from another source that I heard of Sam Cudberry's visits to the training-ground."

Mr. Lacer turned his head quickly, and looked at me very curiously. "Was it from your father you heard it?" he asked. But, although he had looked round quickly, he did not speak quickly. On the contrary, he uttered his question after a pause, and with apparent deliberation.

The words sent a pain to my heart. For they seemed to confirm one of my worst fears; namely, that my father was mixed up with whatever mysteries were going on at the training-ground of which Dodd had spoken. I had been able to solace myself, so long as this fear remained in my own breast, with counter hopes that I was wrong, that my father had not added *this* net to the tangle of troubles he had coiled around him. But directly I heard Mr. Lacer's words the hopes vanished altogether, and I wondered how I could ever have entertained them.

"Father knows all about it, then?" said I, sadly.

Mr. Lacer shrugged his shoulders, and gave a melancholy smile, as who should say, "Can you doubt it?"

Could it be my father, I wondered, who had been seen to accompany Sam, and to linger about the village? But no! My father's person was too well known throughout the neighborhood. All at once a light flashed into my mind. I stopped—we were walking in the garden—and said, with a sudden vehement impulse, "It is you! You go with Sam Cudberry to

this place! Why do you do so? It is not right. It can come to no good."

He was quite amazed by my breathless vehemence, and was silent for a few moments. Then he asked me how I knew this, and said that he did not mean to deny it. I told him that I had *guessed* the truth at that moment; and that I wondered at my own dullness in not having done so long before.

He seemed a good deal troubled; and I was so also, now that the flush of excitement had begun to die away. What right had I to take Mr. Lacer to task for his conduct? I stammered out that I was full of anxiety and sorrow on my father's account, and that my heart was wrung by thinking of how much misery seemed to be in store for mother, and was beginning an excuse, when he stopped me.

"Yes, I know. Your father and mother! I know it all, Anne. Do not fear that I shall attribute your emotion to any interest in *me*. I know you too well for that."

He *had* partly read my thought, and I felt a little confused. But I made an effort to conquer the shy feeling, and told him that it would be ungrateful in me not to feel an interest in him after the friendship he had shown for my parents—and for me. Feeling that he was about to interrupt me again, I added, hurriedly, that naturally and of course my chief care was for my father and mother; and that I was greatly distressed to find my vague suspicions confirmed. "I am, of course, very ignorant of all these things," said I. "Less ignorant, though, than I would fain be, Heaven knows! But, of course, I can not help seeing that it is some speculation connected with the secret training of a race-horse which is luring my father on, and which prevents him from taking any energetic step to free himself from his embarrassments—from his *debts*," I added, changing the phrase; "for it is worse than useless to disguise the bitter truth, by wrapping it up in vague words. And see now what a misfortune this new infatuation is! If it had not been for that, I do believe my father might have been persuaded, some months ago, to give up Water-Eardley, and break free. Do you not believe that, too?"

"Y—yes; I—don't know."

"I believe it—am sure of it. And—oh, it all grows so clear!—father is constantly harping on September—clinging to September. In September that incomprehensible piece of luck is to happen that is to change every thing like a fairy's wand!—*Why, Horsingham races are in September!*"

Mr. Lacer turned away his head and made no answer.

"Oh," said I, clasping my hands, and pressing my fingers hard into the flesh, "what is it he has entered into? Can nothing be done to prevent his losing every thing—his good name, I mean; for I don't cheat myself with hopes of saving any thing else! I implore you to tell me the truth!"

"Anne, Anne, don't be so distressed!" he cried. The tears were running down my cheeks, and I was trembling from head to foot. "I can't bear to see you take it to heart like this. If I had known—if I had thought beforehand— For mercy's sake, don't cry and shake so. Your mother!—your mother may come to the window of her room at any moment. We are within sight from the house."

This suggestion enabled me to command myself better than any thing else could have done. I turned my face from the house, and tried to compose myself, and wiped my eyes with a hand that trembled still.

Gervase Lacer stood looking at me with a face full of pain and perplexity.

"You are so—so—innocent and unworldly," he murmured, still gazing at me with a kind of compassionate surprise. "These things happen so often—every day—and— But you and Mrs. Furness take it all so terribly to heart!"

"Is that wonderful? Do you expect us to be unmoved by ruin—and, what is worse, disgrace?"

"Ay, there it is! Disgrace! But you do not seriously think that there is any thing really wicked in training a horse to run a race, do you?"

"What is the use of speaking in that way? You well know what all this racing and betting and gambling has brought my father to! Is it no disgrace to be in debt, to incur fresh debts with no reasonable hope of paying them, to risk self-respect, peace of mind, the happiness of those that are dear to you, to plunge into crooked ways and stealthy schemes and false pretenses?"

His face flushed a deep red, and he frowned more angrily than I had ever seen him frown. I understood why. He had, by his own confession, entered to some extent into the "stealthy schemes" I spoke of. I did not doubt that he felt some self-reproach, which did not, however, make the reproaches of others more endurable.

"Look here, Miss Furness," he said, "I tell you plainly that you must keep a better guard over yourself, unless you want to do great mischief—irrevocable mischief—to your father."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that as the knowledge of the—" he hesitated so long for a word that I was about to speak, when he brought out the word "*scheme*," which I had used, and brought it out with some bitterness—"the knowledge of your father's scheme has partly reached you, you will do well to be dumb about it to others. Do not breathe a syllable in reference to it to *any one*. Try to forget it. That would be best of all. For any chance of success secrecy is essential. I suppose your righteous indignation will not go so far as to make you cry the matter aloud on the highway!"

"Why," said I, much pained, although I entirely believed that irritated temper alone made him speak thus, "I thought you fully shared

my feeling on this subject; and yet you seem to be sneering at it now!"

His face softened, and the frown gradually cleared away from his brow; but he made two or three turns up and down the path before he spoke again. We had both mechanically resumed our walk from the garden to the shrubbery and back again, passing each time through a little wicket-gate that stood open.

"I do share your feeling to a great degree," he said. "I sympathize with you entirely. I would do any thing to spare Mrs. Furness pain. But—but—it is a little hard to be blamed for doing what I have done in friendship. To be blamed by *you*. It is not every one's blame I should care for. You know that; you must know it."

"Forgive me if I have done you injustice. But, since we are speaking thus plainly, let me ask you *why* you have mixed yourself up with this miserable affair? Why, instead of dissuading father from it, you seem to have joined him in it? And, above all, why, in a matter to which you tell me secrecy is essential, you have admitted Sam Cudberry to your confidence?"

After a little pause Mr. Lacer answered that if I would walk onward with him a little toward the river-side meadows he would reply to all my questions. "That is, if you will have patience to hear me out. I have great faith in your sense and courage, and I believe, after all, it will be best to trust you."

I agreed to his request, and we walked on beyond the shrubbery, and then he began to speak. At first he spoke hesitatingly, and with difficulty; but he warmed as he proceeded. He told me that father had set his heart on buying a race-horse from some famous stable. Flower had incited him to the purchase. Father's means not being sufficient for the purpose—even although he raised money, reckless of consequences, in every possible way—he had (again by Flower's advice) put the advertisement I had seen in the sporting paper. Some man had been found to join him—a Londoner, Mr. Lacer said he was. At this point, and not before, he (Gervase Lacer) had been told, under a promise of solemn secrecy, and offered a share in the benefits of the speculation. This of course, he said—answering my face, not my voice, for I said nothing—he had not accepted. I observed that he well knew what amount of *benefit* might be anticipated from such a scheme. And he answered frankly, yes, truly. It was not a very safe one. Not but that there *was* a chance—there was always a chance—of realizing a large sum. Of course, if there were *no* chance there would be an end of betting. Nothing was sure. Well, what was he to have done? To betray my father's trust, and make his wife and daughter wretched by telling them of things they were entirely powerless to prevent? He laid great stress on that. To break with my father, and leave him to his fate without a friend to speak to or con-

fide in? He could not do it. He made no merit of this, he said. He was bound to the inmates of Water-Eardley by ties too strong for him to sever voluntarily. I might judge by my own feelings whether it were a pleasant task to carry such a secret about with him! This burden he had wished to spare me. He still wished to spare my mother from fruitless anxiety. As for my cousin's being taken into confidence, they had no choice. Sam Cudberry had spied and spied, scenting some mystery, and had kept a watch over his (Gervase Lacer's) movements, and had at last traced him to the training-ground, whither he had gone at my father's request, and on my father's errand. "And I wish," added Mr. Lacer, with hearty vehemence, "that the heir of Woolling had been up to his neck, if not a little deeper, in one of the Woolling horse-ponds, before he had thrust himself upon me!" There was no mistaking the genuine nature of Mr. Lacer's disgust and irritation with Sam as he said the words. "Or I wish," he added, a little more gently, "that he had been any one else's cousin. *That* would have sufficed to make our acquaintance of the briefest."

"And on the success of this horse my father has staked—"

"*Every thing*. You are so pale! Take my arm for a moment. I almost was afraid to tell you—and yet you wished it."

"I did wish it. It was best to tell me. Indeed it was. And when—when will this—when will our fate be decided? At the next Horsingham races?"

"Yes."

"They are near at hand. And my father has risked *every thing*?"

"Every thing that he could risk. Your mother's settlement is, of course, untouched."

"Nothing could dissuade him from this, even now at the eleventh hour? Is there no hope—no chance?"

"Impossible! What could he do? How do you suppose he is to get rid of the responsibilities? No, no, the horse *must* run! Why, he has been backing him heavily"—he checked himself. He had been speaking with impatience—almost with anger. Then he resumed, in an encouraging tone, "But you know it *may* turn out well! It may prove the road to fortune. I confess that although I see risk—of course there is risk, there must be—yet I am very far from despairing. Great strokes of luck *have* happened, and may happen again!"

I shook my head. This tone depressed me almost more than any other, although I knew it was kindly meant. What if the best that they could expect should befall, and a "great stroke of luck," as Mr. Lacer phrased it, were to make my father a winner? The result would be to lead him on to further ventures, and to confirm him forever as a frequenter of the "turf." How terrible that prospect was to me, and how unshakable was my conviction that it must prove a mere road to ruin, grow-

ing ever smoother and steeper, I have no words to say.

"Shall I tell you what I think in my heart?" said I to Mr. Lacer, when he had finished the speech intended to cheer me. "I think that, if we have a living faith in the wisdom of doing right, come what may, and if we believe what conscience tells us, my mother and I ought to pray, not for the success, but the failure of this speculation. It would be better to be ruined outright while there is something left to meet the just claims of creditors, and for father to be driven back from the course he has entered on, at *any* cost of present distress, than to go on, on, on, losing health and hope and honor, and finish in deeper ruin at last."

Mr. Lacer was quite startled, and almost shocked, at the suggestion.

"Pray for *failure*!" he cried. "Good Heavens! you don't know what you are saying!"

He went on to impress upon me the paramount necessity of caution and secrecy. He was sure, he said, quite sure, that I would not willingly be the means of destroying all chance of a fortunate result on the race-day by making any imprudent speeches. I did not know *how* much depended on it. I must be stanch and silent for *all* sakes.

I told him that he need not fear me. I would be silent. But I could not help observing how strange it seemed to me that all this mystery should be necessary. If the whole county knew the state of the case, what difference would it make? Such knowledge would not lame the horse, nor slacken his speed on the race-day?

"Pshaw! you talk like a baby. What difference would it make? Think of the betting! Think what odds we—your father—would be likely to get, if— But I beg your pardon for speaking hastily. You don't understand these things. Of course you can not. Only pray believe—take my word for it—that an imprudent syllable may ruin every thing."

"And how do you propose to secure Sam Cudberry's secrecy? What inducement do you think will avail with him?"

"A bribe," replied Mr. Lacer, deliberately.

"A—bribe?"

"Did you think your second cousin inaccessible to one? I am very frank, you see. Perhaps too frank. Yes; Mr. Sam Cudberry has been offered a bribe—a tangible bribe in coin of the realm; and for that consideration (the mention of it did not shock him, as it does you, I assure you) he promised to hold his tongue."

"What a web of falsehood and meanness and baseness!"

"It *is* bad enough," he answered, impulsively.

I have said that Gervase Lacer's emotions were easily excited. Now as he spoke the tears came into his eyes, and the color rose in his face. "It *is* bad enough, God knows. If I could clear myself from it all, I would; upon

my soul, I would! If I had known such good, pure-hearted creatures as you long ago— Don't think all evil of me, Anne."

He spoke very earnestly. I felt almost ashamed to hear his fervently expressed wish to extricate himself from this slough; for was it not my father who had led him into it? I gave him my hand. He took it in both his own, and, looking steadfastly at me, said, once more, "Don't think *all* evil of me, Anne. Beside your whiteness I show dark enough; but I am not all selfish. I keep back words that I am longing to utter. I press them back into my heart. My heart is very full, Anne Furness, because I will not risk adding to your anxieties just now; because I wish you to be free to speak to me as a friend at all events. Come," he added, after a short pause, abruptly relinquishing my hand and turning away—"come; they will be looking for us. Let us go back to the house."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WEEK or two later the Arkwrights fell into great trouble. One of the tradesmen who served them—a butcher—became very importunate for his money, and finally, they being unable to pay him at once, took out a summons against Mr. Arkwright. The poor clergyman made shift—Heaven knows by what scraping and sacrifices—to pay the money. But the misfortune did not end there. Other creditors, seeing the butcher's success, grew impatient and surly. Duns besieged the dark little house in Wood Street, and their shadows on the threshold made it darker than ever. Alice Kitchen was full of sympathy for the Arkwrights, and it was from her that I learned these facts. But she could not be so much at the clergyman's house as formerly, for she had consented to marry Dodd. The wedding was to take place in the autumn, and Alice was busy preparing her clothes. Besides, she was backward and forward between Horsingham and Brookfield a good deal in those days, seeing to the arrangement and furnishing of a couple of rooms for her father in the latter place; for, as soon as his daughter's marriage was settled, old Mr. Kitchen declared he would not remain in Horsingham, and he easily obtained the situation of foreman with Messrs. Hobson, of Brookfield. This arrangement was very displeasing to his son. Old Kitchen was an excellent workman, and had had an almost life-long experience of the coach-making business to which his son had succeeded. His absence would make a gap which would be difficult to fill up.

"Mat's just like a bear wi' a sore head," said Alice to me. Whereby she intended to express that he was in a very sulky and ill-tempered condition, and ready to growl at every one. "And it ain't misfortunes as sours his temper," she pursued. "If money could sweeten folks' dispositions, Mat ought to be like a lump of

sugar-candy; but I reckon that lucky folks is sometimes like a spoiled bairn—more they have, more they want. When there's no real trouble they just cry for the moon. Father wants to be near me and Dodd. That's nat'ral enough, Miss Anne; not to speak of the good wages and lighter work as he'll have at Hobson's. And if Mat *has* to pay a strange foreman more'n he paid father, why he's rich enough to afford it. Rich! There's no end, it seems to me, to Mat's riches. It turns out as he's the owner of a lot o' houses as Grandfather Green bought cheap a very little before he died. Scarce a day goes by but what we hear of some fresh property belonging to Mat. I don't grudge it him, Miss Anne. No; really and truly I do not. After the first disappointment about grandfather's will I made up my mind as I wouldn't fret, and grow jealous and angry about it. As it is, you know, we are no worse off than we was before—which we should be if we'd taken to grizzling over what can't be mended. But I will say as it worrits me to hear Mat and Selina going on as if it was all their own merit as had got 'em the money. I know as Mat always had a pious turn; of course I don't mean to say to the contrary. But what's Selina got to be so set up about? looking around in chapel as proud as if her money could buy her a private road to salvation all to herself, like the right-o'-way through Woolling Park, as Sir George went to law about."

It was in vain to try to stem the flow of Alice's copious speech; but when she paused a moment of her own accord I tried to bring her back to the subject of the Arkwrights' troubles.

"Ah, dear me, yes, poor bodies!" exclaimed Alice, starting off again with exactly the same cheerful volubility. "Poor Mrs. Arkwright came to me last Wednesday, and, says she, 'You'll be surprised to see me out of my own home at this hour, Alice'—and for the matter o' that, so I should ha' been to see her out o' doors at a'most any hour, unless it was at market—'but,' she says, 'we're in great straits, and maybe you can help us; and I'm sure you will if you can,' she says. And then she told me as their quarter's rent was due that day fortnight, and couldn't I persuade their landlord to give 'em a little grace? 'Me persuade!' I says. 'Why, my dear good soul, who is your landlord, as you think I can persuade him?' 'Don't you know?' says she, looking at me with that suspicious kind of a shine in her big black eyes—you know the look I mean, Miss Anne. 'No,' says I, 'I don't know, unless it may be old Ashby; for half Wood Street did belong to him once upon a time.' 'No,' said Mrs. Arkwright, very quietly, 'our landlord isn't old Ashby now. Our landlord is Mr. Matthew Kitchen.' 'My brother Mat?' says I. 'Niver in this world, sure.' But it's true, Miss Anne. The Arkwrights' house is one of them as Grandfather Green bought, and it's Mat's property as certain as the day. But, eh, dear me, Miss

Anne, *I* haven't any power to persuade Mat. It's no good *my* speaking."

"You might try, Alice," said I, "for Mr. Arkwright's sake."

"Well, I did try," returned Alice, bringing out the statement a little unwillingly, I thought. "But Mat cut me as short as short could be. I tell you he's been out of humor with me and father lately to that degree as if I was to say the moon *wasn't* made of green cheese he'd be ready to declare he knew for certain as it *was*."

"But you don't think that your brother will really be very hard on the Arkwrights, Alice, do you?"

"Oh n-no; I don't exactly expect as Mat will be—*very* hard on 'em. I hope not, I'm sure," she answered, doubtfully. "Of course you know property's property and rent's rent. A landlord has a right to get his due, same as every body else. But I—I don't suppose Mat 'll be—*very* hard on 'em. The way would be," added Alice, after an unusually long pause for her—"the best way and best chance would be for some one to say a good word for them to Selina. Mat don't refuse her any thing scarcely. It's a curious thing, as I've often noticed, Miss Anne, the more a woman thinks of herself the more a man 'll think of her too. I think sometimes as men are with their wives some way like a many mothers are with their bairns—the fractionest gets the most cockered up."

I was truly concerned for the Arkwrights. Not the less so that I had very little belief in the forbearance or charity of Matthew Kitchen. I had made up my mind to go and see Mrs. Arkwright. I had hesitated a little before doing so, because I was not sure whether her jealous sensitiveness might not make her averse to receive any visit that could be construed into an intrusion on their private troubles. But I had finally resolved to go to her, when my intention was frustrated by the very unexpected appearance of Mrs. Arkwright herself at Water-Eardley.

On entering my mother's little sitting-room one day about noon, bringing from the garden some flowers which mother loved, to fill a vase with, I found Mrs. Arkwright sitting grim and stiff by the window, and my mother opposite to her, looking greatly disturbed. Mrs. Arkwright was yellower than ever, and had grown very thin. There were dark rings round her large bright eyes, and her strong black brows were gathered into a fixed frown, which, however, expressed painful anxiety rather than anger. She was very, very shabby, and seemed to have lost the exquisite neatness which formerly had, in a measure, graced her poor apparel. The hot summer sunshine streamed in pitilessly upon her rusty shawl and scanty gown and discolored straw bonnet. She was very dusty too, and looked fagged and jaded. But she sat bolt upright in her chair, with her hands clasped before her, in an attitude that singular-

ly expressed the eager, energetic nature of the woman, and her pitiless, stern disdain for the smallest self-indulgence.

She had come, she said, after barely acknowledging my greeting with the preoccupied air of one who is impatient of having his attention diverted from some point of absorbing interest, to ask my mother a favor.

"I am sure," said mother, casting a glance almost of dismay upon me, "that my will is good to serve you, Mrs. Arkwright; but I very much fear that very few people can have less power of doing so than I."

Seeing that mother, as it were, appealed to me to come to her assistance, and that Mrs. Arkwright had turned her eager eyes on my face, as though she were desirous of making me a party to the conference, I ventured to ask what favor it was she sought of my mother, knowing Mrs. Arkwright well enough to feel sure that she would prefer even abrupt directness to any more politely circuitous forms of speech.

"I want Mrs. Furness to go and plead our cause with our landlord's wife," she returned.

"But I—I—don't know her," stammered forth my mother, timidly.

"Yes, you do."

"Mrs. Arkwright means Selina, mother, Matthew Kitchen's wife."

"Ah, *you* know who our landlord's wife is!" exclaimed Mrs. Arkwright, sharply, and as though she had detected some attempt at deception.

I explained that I had only recently heard the fact, speaking as gently as I could. I was too genuinely sorry for Mrs. Arkwright to think of taking offense at her manner.

"Mr. Arkwright only requires a little time," she said, speaking still in the same sharp, dry manner, although, every now and then, the tears welled up into her eyes, and her mouth twitched. "We have had a good many difficulties to contend with lately. The children fell ill. It is true, the doctor cost us nothing—your father is a good man, Mrs. Furness—but illness is always costly in one way or another. Then, some little time ago, Mr. Arkwright raised a small sum of money to pay off the last that remained of some old college debts. He got so tired and wearied with squeezing the money out, drop by drop—it was such a never-ending work—that he thought it would be best to borrow the sum here, and owe it all in one lump; and the man that lent it was a Horsingham person, and Mr. Arkwright thought he would be more patient, seeing that we were living in the place, and he was safe to be paid, principal and interest, in the end. Perhaps it was a mistake; but if you ever have had to carry a weight for a long time, you will know that it eases you to shift it from one hand to another, though the burden remains just as heavy as before."

"Yes; I can understand that," said my mother, with a little sigh.

"In short, all this threw us behindhand, and

we are not ready with the rent, and we want Mr. Kitchen to give us time. It's only a question of two or three months," said Mrs. Arkwright, abruptly. She had been softening somewhat, when, on my mother's little word and sigh of sympathy, she suddenly resumed her dry, hard manner. It was ungracious, certainly. But it awoke in me unspeakable pity. As I looked at her the thought came into my head how, if this woman had been a pilgrim in old times, she would have struggled and staggered on, with bleeding feet and close-shut lips, over sharp pebbles and barbed thorns, and never have relieved her bursting heart by a word or a moan of complaint. There was stern stuff in this prosaic-looking English curate's wife, and a spark of sombre fire that had been haply transmitted to her from some fierce Norseman through a long line of yeoman ancestors.

Mother rather shrank back into herself on seeing Mrs. Arkwright's unflinching eyes fixed on her. She did not know Mrs. Arkwright so well as I did, and it was natural that she should feel herself to be in some sort rebuffed by the latter's sternness.

"I should think there is no doubt that Matthew Kitchen will not distress your husband, Mrs. Arkwright," said mother, timidly.

"No doubt? Why do you suppose I am disquieting myself, then? It is not my fancy, I assure you. I am not a fanciful woman."

Mrs. Arkwright had her fancies too. But conceiving, like many other people, that fancy was necessarily an airy, idle, leisurely sort of faculty, she disdainfully disclaimed it. Ah! Mrs. Arkwright, was there no fancy in your jealous preservation of that poor necklace, treasured side by side with the old faded love-letters?

"But—what can I do?" said my mother.

Mrs. Arkwright repressed an impatient shrug, and pulled her shawl over her shoulders to conceal the movement. She put a strong constraint upon herself to explain distinctly that Alice had told her to apply to Mrs. Matthew Kitchen; that she (Mrs. Arkwright) had reason to believe that her landlord's wife looked on her with personal disfavor; that she had heard Mrs. Matthew boast with much complacency of having been "called upon" by the ladies of Water-Eardley manor; and that it seemed to herself and to Alice highly probable that mother's intercession might avail to influence Selina to influence her husband.

"I don't ask you to go on purpose to the woman's house, Mrs. Furness," she said, in conclusion; "but when you see her—she will come here, I suppose, won't she, to return your visit?"

Mother winced a little, and said perhaps; she didn't know; she supposed so.

"Well, *if* she comes, will you say a word for us?" said Mrs. Arkwright, rising.

Mother promised to do so, but in a hesitating manner which I was sorry for, as I feared the curate's wife would misinterpret it. I well knew it to arise from mingled feelings, none of which

were other than kindly and sympathizing toward the Arkwrights.

It was impossible to persuade Mrs. Arkwright to eat or drink. She set off again to Horsingham, along the dusty road and under the blazing sun, with a grim sort of resolution in her face, but with a step which all her courage could not make buoyant, and care was expressed in every line and movement of her weary figure.

"Poor Mrs. Arkwright!" I said, looking after her as she disappeared down the garden path.

"Yes; I am very sorry for her, dear. But, Anne, is she not a little hard and grim?" said mother.

"She cases herself in that artificial shell—perhaps just because she is *not* really hard, mother."

"But, my child, she need not case herself in any shell with me. I am not so fierce or unfeeling, surely!"

"No, mother dear. But when people's feelings have been harshly and roughly handled in their passage through the world, it may be they become so sore and sensitive that even the soft touch of pity hurts them."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THERE were several motives at work to make Mat Kitchen hard on Mr. Arkwright. The latter was a gentleman. He was in his power very completely; for Mr. Arkwright not only owed three quarters' rent, but he also owed the balance of the sum lent at interest by old Green. Matthew was now, as his grandfather's heir, Mr. Arkwright's creditor. Then, whereas Mrs. Arkwright had been very easy of access to Alice's friendly offices and rough, cheery good-nature, she had shown herself stiff and stubborn as a rock toward Selina, whose new bonnet alone (as she herself indignantly observed) was worth every article of Mrs. Arkwright's clothing put together, and appraised at a liberal valuation!

Selina had great influence over her husband. There was no doubt in the world about it. Many people were surprised at this, as thinking Mat Kitchen an unlikely subject to be much swayed by affection. I was surprised at it too in those days. But on looking back, I believe I understand it all well enough. It was not solely by his affection that Mat was led to indulge his wife's wishes, and share her prejudices on so many points. He *was* fond of her in his way. He would have been "fond"—if I may use the word in such a connection—of a china dinner-service, or a gilt mirror-frame, or a dog, or a horse, that belonged to *him*. His sense of ownership imparted a great degree of exaggeration to his estimate of all that was his. And then Selina was the echo of his own low nature. Had she tried to turn him from cant to sincerity, from avarice to liberality, from self-assertion to humility, from the sullen, gloomy code he called religion to charity and sweetness

and compassion, her *influence* would have had an unpromising task of it.

Selina came to Water-Eardley in due course. But mother's little attempt to speak for the Arkwrights met with small encouragement. I had feared that it would be so; and I carefully abstained from putting in a word on their behalf, knowing myself to be no favorite with Selina, and thinking that my advocacy would be likely rather to injure than advance the cause.

Selina never interfered with Mr. Kitchen's business, she said. Mr. Kitchen was a just man, and his character was well known to stand high in Horsingham—higher it might be than some that thought themselves above him. Mr. Kitchen was obviously a special favorite of Providence. He prospered in almost all his doings. But he had his trials, sent, Selina opined, for the express purpose of causing his virtue and godliness to shine out before all men. For Mr. Kitchen never made complaints of nobody (the redundant negative was Selina's own), nor yet went about whining and whimpering that he was badly used. Mr. Kitchen didn't owe a farthing in the world. When pay-day came he was ready for it, be it for rent, or taxes, or subscription to the chapel. Selina wondered that some folks wasn't ashamed of going on as they *did* go on with such a bright example before them.

"I am sure," said mother, with a little timid attempt at being complimentary and diplomatic, "that Mr. Kitchen is very punctual, and—and honest indeed. But, you see, this poor gentleman's, Mr. Arkwright's, case is not exactly the same as your husband's. He has a large family and small means, and he is still embarrassed by old debts contracted in his college days. Mr. Kitchen, who is so prudent and sensible in money-matters, had no such clog on him in his start in life."

"College, indeed!" exclaimed Selina, with stolid contempt. "Matthew thanks the Lord, and so do I, as *he* was never brought up in one of them heathen places. See what comes of it. Mr. Arkwright's got a head full of stuck-up notions, and a pocket full of nothing at all!"

"Precisely the reverse of Mr. Matthew Kitchen's case," said I.

Mother looked at me deprecatingly, but Selina accepted my words as being entirely complimentary to her husband, and replied, deliberately, "I should hope it is the reverse, Anne, of Mr. Kitchen. If Mrs. Arkwright boasts about colleges, I'd have her to know that we should be able to send that boy of ours to any college in the land—if we liked to have him brought up on ungodly books, and hear popish services, and join in the revels of the wicked; for Matthew tells me that the colleges are hot-beds of iniquity—and that's more than she'll manage to do for *her* little lad, I'm pretty certain!"

The baseness of the woman's exultation sickened me. Mother tried to say another word or two, but Selina coolly cut her short.

"Now, Mrs. Furness," said she, settling her

shawl about her as if to go, but not rising from her chair until she had finished her speech (and as she sat there with her feet on a cushion, her back well supported, and her whole attitude expressive of a deliberate care for her own comfort, as an object of almost paramount importance, I thought of the widely contrasted figure of the poor clergyman's wife who had occupied that place so short a time previous)—"now, Mrs. Furness, I'll tell you what it is. It's meant very kind, I don't make any doubt, your speaking up for the parson; but if you want to do them a service you'd better talk to your own husband than to me or to mine. And you needn't look so surprised, for I dare say you understand me, and if you don't, Anne does. Matthew is a prosperous man, but he has his trials, as I said. He has a deal of money owing to him, has Matthew. He has advanced, and advanced, time and again, and he don't much know when he's to see the color of his money back again. If some of Matthew's debtors would pay up, why, he might be able to give others a little more time. You just get Mr. Furness to square accounts with Mr. Kitchen a bit. And it may be as Mr. Kitchen'll be kind and charitable enough to have patience with the parson. But Mr. Kitchen he has his own payments to make. His men don't work for nothing, and there's expenses as well as profits in his business. And his own father a-going to desert him, as it'll cost Matthew I don't know what and all for a new foreman from London. And his sister a-taking up with a publican as has no more religion than a pint pot!"

It was thus that Selina spoke of her old sweet-heart and fellow-servant, Dodd.

And then she took her departure, not ruffled, or heated, or in any outward way disturbed. Her most malignant and unfeeling speeches were invariably uttered with elephantine imperturbability; and she was wont to boast that it was impossible to "put her out," for she had always had a "wonderful good temper."

She left disturbed feeling enough behind her, though. Mother was bitterly distressed by her parting speech, and I had little or no consolation to offer her.

As the time of the autumn races drew near, and the usual signs which preceded that busy period began to be seen in Horsingham, father's feverish restlessness rose from day to day until it reached a pitch when he scarcely had any more command of himself than an insane person. Indeed, at times I was visited by painful darting apprehensions for his reason. Ger-vase Lacer, too, showed traces of intense anxiety. He and father made frequent absences together now. Sam Cudberry came to Water-Eardley, and was regaled with food and drink, but he complained of its being "infernal dull" there now.

And he dropped vague words to the effect that had he known Lacer was going to leave the army he (Sam) would never have bestowed so much of his patronage and society on him

as he had done; for since Lacer had become a civilian he had grown awfully slow company, and had no longer the opportunity of presenting Sam Cudberry, Junior, of Woolling, to any choice military gentleman who might have been able to value his society as it deserved. Sam was, in a word, growing sulky. Heaven knows I studied his humors, and watched his moods with breathless attention. I felt like one at sea, to whom the pilot has confided that the ship is drifting among shoals and quicksands, but who knows only this vague danger, and is ignorant of any chart or guide to show whether the vessel's progress be toward hope or despair. How much Sam Cudberry could do toward ruining my father I knew not. Whether or not he would be capable of betraying that which he had accepted a bribe to keep secret I felt no degree of certainty. "And then, after all," thought I, "it *must* mainly depend on the horse's running whether father wins or loses!"

Mother had not ceased to cherish her plan of going away from Water-Eardley, nor to work for it as far as possible. She found an unexpected ally in Uncle Cudberry. He was in the habit of going into Horsingham occasionally on market-day; and consequently heard some gossip about the state of affairs at Water-Eardley. Mr. Cudberry did not say a word of this in the bosom of his home circle. He was not communicative by nature; and he knew well that no power on earth could have insured his daughters' discretion as to another person's secret, and he knew, too, that there were manifold reasons which rendered it undesirable that rumors of my father's being about to leave the neighborhood should get abroad in Horsingham before the time was ripe. But he went to see my grandfather, and talked matters over with him, and then came and told my mother (much to her surprise) that he had done so.

The result was that he highly approved of the plan my mother was so anxious to forward. In answer to a timid hint of hers Uncle Cudberry said, dryly, "No, no, no; we won't let George fancy he's following any body's way but his own. Mustn't let him think as the reins are being took out of his hand. Let me alone for that. I sha'n't say a word to him, you may depend."

"George *quite* approves the plan," returned my mother, coloring. "We have talked it over together. I hope you don't imagine that I would for an instant think of—of—deceiving George, do you?"

"Well, I reckon that all you womenkind are pretty well alike for that; only some does it for evil, and some for good," Mr. Cudberry made answer, in his slow, impassible way. But, after a minute, he added, with that glimmering remembrance of having once been a gentleman which my mother alone seemed to possess the spell to awaken, "Any way, George has reason to be proud—and the family has reason to be proud—of the new member he brought into it when he married you, Mrs. George."

And he made mother the strangest stiff little bow—a bow that gave one the idea of being made across a pompous fence of cravat, starched and voluminous; and yet a wisp of frayed black silk was all that encompassed Uncle Cudberry's lean throat at the moment.

I suppose he had left off making bows in the days of the Regency, and the disused courtesy conjured up a reminiscence of the disused garments also, as all well-authenticated ghosts are wont to appear in their habit as they lived.

"The family!" Uncle Cudberry had, in his own peculiar way, almost as great an idea of the family importance as had his daughters; and despite his fitful visitings of politeness toward my mother, he did not scruple to let her understand that his chief reason for urging his nephew's departure was his wish to avoid a public crash of ruin, which could not fail to be disgraceful to "the family."

I was watchful to discover, if possible, whether Uncle Cudberry had any suspicion of the new venture my father had embarked in, and which was so soon to be tried. Apparently he had none; for, on my mother's meeting his arguments against further procrastination with the constant reply, "After September—George has promised to take some decided step directly September is over," he as constantly protested against the unreasonableness of delay, and concluded with the demand, "Why? What in the world for? When September's done, why not go on to the end of October? Why not go on the twelve months through, at that rate?"

To which my mother had no answer to make. Her spirits fluctuated a good deal. She would be sometimes despondent, sometimes hopeful. These latter moods of hers—when she would sit and hold my hand, or stroke my hair, planning what we should do in the new life, and how we must study to make father forget his troubles, like a feverish dream, and to bring him back to his old fond kindness by our patience and tenderness and duty—these moods, I say, depressed me more than her sad ones. I felt so guilty with the weight of my secret knowledge of the risk that was to be run, and the stake that was to be played for, at the dreadful autumn races. And they drew near swiftly: they were close at hand.

We did not see my grandfather often, as I have said. Donald came sometimes. My father had met him, and had received him with cold indifference, but still not in such a manner as to preclude Donald's visiting the house. In truth, father at this time was too intensely preoccupied with one subject to exhibit strong feeling on any other whatsoever. He ate his meals with the little leather note-book on the table beside him, or a "sporting" newspaper in his hand. Nothing roused him, nothing touched him, but the one absorbing topic. It was pitiful to behold: all his old, frank, manly manner was gone. We never heard his ringing hearty laugh, or saw him come bursting into the house from a long tramp in the fields, bringing with him a

healthy atmosphere of fresh air and good-humor. Those things were past. I remembered them sometimes *incredulously*, as one thinks of the June sunshine in dark December.

One afternoon Donald came to Water-Eardley, and asked for me. "Will you mind putting your hat on and taking a turn in the water-side meadows, Anne?" he said. "I want to speak to you."

Donald had not altogether lost his old boyish shyness. Often, in talking to me, he would be as constrained as though we were strangers; and would fall into fits of awkward silence, which I, with my more glib woman's tongue, had perforce to break, though often I was shy enough too, Heaven knows! But on this occasion Donald forgot to be shy. His manner was full of suppressed eagerness, and his eyes grew bright and blue as the sky over our heads as he took his way with me toward the river-side meadows, smiling to himself every minute. Roger Bacon, grandfather's Skye terrier, had accompanied Donald, and followed us into the fields with a self-denying air, panting very much, lolling his tongue out, blinking up at us now with one bright eye, now with the other, from under his slate-colored mane, and saying, very plainly, "Oh dear me, dear me, dear me! What a deal of business I have on hand! Not a moment to repose myself in the shade, nor even to take a hasty lap of water. But duty is duty, and I *must* look after these young creatures. Quite impossible they should get on for ten minutes without me."

"What is it, Donald?" said I, when we had got on to the sward of the meadows. "Is it good?"

"Very good! At least I hope it is. Look here, Anne. I didn't want to startle Mrs. Furness, or—or—put her out; so I thought that if you would read that, and say what you think, and then tell your mother in your own way—"

He put a letter into my hand. It was from Colonel Fisher, that comrade and far-away cousin of Captain Ayrle, to whose Scotch home Donald had gone when he left Mortlands in his school-boy days. I learned from the letter that Donald had written to this gentleman to interest himself in finding a situation for my father. Colonel Fisher stated that, after losing some time, and with a little trouble, he had heard of something which might suit "Dr. Hewson's son-in-law." (This circumstance of his being Dr. Hewson's son-in-law was obviously and naturally the sole reason why Donald's friends cared to interest themselves for my father.) A stranger had recently purchased a Highland estate in Colonel Fisher's neighborhood. The said stranger knew nothing of farming or the rearing of cattle—Colonel Fisher spoke of him as "some cockney tailor or other"—and would be glad to meet with a competent person to manage his estate. The scenery was beautiful, the situation healthy, and the salary would be sufficiently liberal, to any one coming with such ample testimonies

to his skill and experience as Mr. George Furness.

"Is it good, Anne?" asked Donald, watching my face.

"Good!" I exclaimed, between crying and laughing. "Oh, Donald!" I put out my hand, which he took and held in a close clasp.

"I'm very glad," he said, simply. "Mr. Furness won't mind the man's being a cockney tailor, will he?"

I shook my head, and cast my eyes once more over the letter which I held in my disengaged hand.

"Besides, that's only the Colonel's form of speech. He has a rooted idea that every body from the south of the Tweed is a cockney, and that every cockney is a tailor! But I don't think that need distress us, eh?"

I laughed and shook my head once more. And as I shook it a big tear fell on the paper in my hand. Roger Bacon, who had sat himself down in an attitude of vigilant waiting as soon as we had stopped to talk, rose up, walked round me, raised himself on his hind-legs, and snuffed uneasily at the letter I held. Apparently being satisfied that it contained nothing of a dangerous or disquieting nature which could account for my emotion, he gave a stifled *woof*, as though to express his regret at finding me so weak-minded, and sat down again.

"You have quite a color in your face, Anne," said Donald, speaking in a very low voice, although there was certainly no need for his doing so. "How dear it is to see the roses there again! Do you know you have been looking so pale and wan all these months?"

I thought of another pale, wan face, into which this news would bring light and color.

"Oh, let me go and tell mother!" I exclaimed, hastily wiping the tears from my eyes—still with the hand which held the letter, for Donald kept possession of the other. He did not speak, but looked up at me in a strange, wistful way, and then dropped his eyes again. Roger Bacon got up once more, perceiving in some occult way that there was an intention of moving from the spot, and stood on three legs, with the fourth poised in a pawing attitude, looking back at us as who should say, "Now *are* you coming? Here I am kept in a state of nervous tension by my conscientious anxiety to do my duty, and see you safe back to the house."

It flashed on me that I had not said a word of thanks to Donald. Was he waiting for that? I did not in my heart of hearts think that he *was* asking or expecting to be thanked at that instant. But an inscrutable, subtile instinct, a strange, wayward movement of the mind, made me choose to assume that it was so.

"I have not thanked you a bit for your goodness, Donald. In my selfish delight I did not say a word of *your* part in this. But you know I feel it very deeply, and so will mother. Thank you a thousand times! Indeed I am very grateful."

He released my hand.

"I don't want you to be grateful," he said, and began to walk slowly toward the house. Roger Bacon darted off before us like an arrow from a bow, stopped with astonishing suddenness, looked back, hesitated, finally returned, gazed up into Donald's face, hastily licked his hand as it hung down by his side, and walked soberly back with us, keeping close at Donald's heels all the time.

CHAPTER XXIX.

It was the day before my birthday, and within a week of the day of the great race. Horsingham was full already. On the morrow the business of the great autumn meeting was to begin. The high-road was thronged with the usual motley crowd of foot-passengers and vehicles. Mother and I kept within doors, and when, toward evening, we threw wide open the windows of her little sitting-room, we congratulated ourselves on the circumstance of their looking across the garden, and beyond that to the meadows, and being away from the dust and noise of the high-road.

We had been talking of Colonel Fisher's letter. Mother had broached the subject some days ago to my father; and he had received it, she said, very well on the whole. The distance from Horsingham, and the fact that he would be utterly unknown in the Highlands, had seemed to please him. If he would but bestir himself at once. If he would but write to Scotland, and make a direct application for the post, without further loss of time. But it was in vain to hope it. Nothing would induce him to take any step in the matter until after the September races; and too great importunity on the subject might irritate him into throwing over the plan altogether. I was secretly disquieted by the fear that he did not seriously contemplate making the application at all—that he clung on desperately to the anticipation of some marvelous stroke of "luck," which should absolve him from the necessity of making any such sacrifice. But mother cherished a trembling hope that he was in earnest, and it was not for me to chill it.

"Mr. Sam Cudberry and Miss Cudberry of Woolling," announced the maid, opening the door wide; and in walked Sam and Tilly. The latter was rustling and bustling with even more than her usual fussiness. Sam slouched behind her, with a mien compounded of sheepishness, sulkiness, and self-assertion.

We were greatly surprised to see them together. But Tilly forestalled any expression of surprise on our part by exclaiming at once, "Now I suppose you *are* astonished! Did you ever? The idea of Sam and me making calls together! Though there's no reason whatever why he should not be glad and proud to escort his sisters *any where* and at *any time*."

Mother bade them welcome, and asked Tilly

to remove her bonnet, and remain to have some tea, which would be ready presently.

"Oh, la, yes! We've *come* to tea!" screamed Tilly, with a burst of ear-piercing hilarity. But she resisted all efforts to induce her to take off her bonnet. It was adorned with as many of the pink hollyhocks she had worn at Christmas as could be placed upon it, and, surmounting Tilly's diminutive person, gave her a curious top-heavy appearance, which was increased by her stiff manner of holding her head and throat, in the attitude of a juggler balancing a pole.

"And so Cousin George is not at home?" said she, glancing sharply round. "*Po-o-or* George! What a pity!"

Sam made a grimace at me over his sister's shoulder, and pointed with his thumb in her direction two or three times. But I was unable to comprehend the drift of this pantomime, save that it expressed disgust and annoyance. There was something unusual in the demeanor of both brother and sister. When Sam proposed to me to take a stroll round the garden before tea, Tilly instantly announced her intention of accompanying us. And when Tilly began a discussion about some embroidery patterns with my mother, Sam placed himself close to them, and listened as eagerly as though button-hole and satin stitch had been the occupation of his life.

We went into the garden—Tilly, Sam, and I—and sauntered about the paths, looking at the bright formal flower-beds. I asked after Aunt and Uncle Cudberry, and Henny and Clemmy, and having received satisfactory replies to my questions, began to be somewhat at a loss what to say next. Suddenly, when Tilly was stooping to examine and criticise a dahlia, Sam twitched my sleeve and whispered rapidly, "I say, Miss Cudberry's twigged the whole business."

Before I could recover from my surprise and perplexity Tilly raised her head, and Sam appeared absorbed in the manufacture of a cigarette.

"You're *not* going to smoke, Sam Cudberry," screamed his sister, growing very red and angry.

She had a horror, real or affected, of tobacco smoke; and it was one of the numerous by-laws and regulations of the Cudberry family that no one was to light pipe or cigar in Miss Matilda's presence.

"Only a cigarette," said Sam, rolling and twisting the tobacco in its paper case. "You can't mind it in the open air!"

"But I do mind it, and I don't allow it," returned his sister, waspishly. And after a moment she said she should go back to the house and have a chat with Mrs. Georgè; and accordingly set off thither.

"Very well," cried Sam, calling after her. "All right! Fair play's a jewel. I shall just finish my cigarette, and you can have your say about the embroidery. Understand!"

Tilly made no other response than tossing her head and shrugging her shoulders. She

disappeared into the house, and Sam and I were left alone together.

"See here, we must look sharp, you know," said he, speaking very quickly. "I ain't a-going to give Tilly many minutes in there along with your mother. This is the state of the game. Tilly, by prying and poking and listening and watching, has found out about the private training-ground, and that Lacer and your father and me are in it somehow or other. Not that *I'm* in deeper than I can step out again, high and dry. Never fear! But she knows my governor would blow up sky-high if he got an inkling of the matter; so that gives her a bit of a hold on me, don't you see? She talks about disinheriting and cutting off with a shilling; but that's all my eye. The governor don't choose Woolling to belong to any but a Cudberry, and I'm the only heir male; so *that's* right enough; but he has the whip-hand so long as he's above-ground, and he might bother me a good bit about a few little money-matters, and make things unpleasant. So it won't suit my book for Tilly to blab. Now, of course, it can't be expected that I should sacrifice myself, can it? So I've made a kind of—a kind of a—"

"Bargain," I suggested.

"Well, yes—a bargain with Tilly to hold her tongue. There's nothing I hate more than a row where I ain't pretty sure to come out of it comfortable. I've acted uncommonly honorable by Lacer. But Tilly was too sharp for us. There was no help for it."

"Will Tilly be silent?" I inquired, anxiously. In truth, I was very ignorant as to what amount of evil she could do to my father's schemes at this late hour; nor was that my chief anxiety, I confess. The thought startled me that she might blurt out the whole matter to my mother.

"Well, if she don't keep mum, the bargain's off. But ten to one she'll begin slanging Lacer to your mother. You won't mind that, you know, now I've explained how it is."

"In Heaven's name, why has she been so keen to find out this business? What can it matter to her? How does it interest her?"

"Oh, she hates Lacer like—like the deuce!"

"But *why*? For what reason on earth?"

"Lord, Anne, what a flat you are in some things! Why, don't you see? she had made up her mind to catch him for herself, and he wouldn't be caught. And—and she's as jealous of you as old boots. And you know, after all, the fellow didn't act quite correct at our hop. That wasn't the way to treat Miss Cudberry of Woolling, hang it all! I don't want to hurt your feelings, Anne; but, between you and me, Lacer's devilish stuck up. And I believe it's true, what Tilly says, that his father does keep a tavern. But that ain't the worst. I've heard some rum things— However, a nod's as good as a wink. Don't you go and get bamboozled. Think of the family!"

By this time we were close upon the house,

which I entered in a state of miserable bewilderment. My efforts at self-possession were not assisted by Sam's final whisper, as he threw away the last remnant of his cigarette, "I say, don't look so blue! Don't let Tilly twig that I've been saying any thing."

"And so Cousin George is away? Po-o-or George; I'm so sorry!" said Tilly, when we were all seated round the tea-table. A glance at mother's face had assured me that, as yet, Tilly had not said any thing to alarm her.

"Yes; George is gone—on business—to some place beyond Brookfield. It may be that they will go on to W——; and if so we shall not see George home to-night."

"*They* may go on!" said Tilly, so sharply that mother absolutely winced before making answer—

"Mr. Lacer is with George."

This was the opportunity Tilly had waited for. She forthwith availed herself of it to vituperate Mr. Lacer with all her power. She *wondered* that Cousin George could associate with such a fellow. She was *astonished* that Mrs. George consented to endure him in her house. She could not have believed that even the giddiness and vanity of *extreme* youth would have induced Anne to be flattered by the attentions of such a low person! And so on, with deafening loudness and volubility.

Mother remained aghast. She had had a specimen of Tilly's dislike to Mr. Lacer on a former occasion. But that had fallen far short of the present tirade, whose effect was enhanced by many nods and grimaces, and dark hints of unimagined horrors which Tilly *could* reveal were she so minded. It had scarcely needed Sam's warning to keep me silent. Any attempt on my part to cope with Tilly's eloquence or to rebut her statements could have but resulted in a mere chaos of sound and fury, which it made me shudder to think of. Sam had neither the power nor the inclination to interfere with his sister's speech. At first he glanced at me apprehensively, but, finding that I remained silent, he became quite at ease, and devoured slice after slice of a cake that stood before him on the table, with as much coolness as though he were deaf or Tilly dumb. So the latter had it all her own way. But the absence of opposition did not soothe her. Higher and higher rose her voice, and more and more poignant became her epithets. She had reached a very whirlwind of passion, when, without any preliminary warning—for Tilly's tones effectually quenched all minor noises—the subject of her violent abuse stood among us.

My father and Mr. Lacer, and a third man whom I had never seen before, were in the room. There was a momentary silence. Then a general shaking of hands, and every body began speaking at once. I do not believe that either of the three newly arrived men had gleaned any idea of what Tilly had been talking of.

"Oh, George dear, I'm so glad!" exclaimed my mother, taking father's hand, and almost clinging to it. Tilly's eloquence had wholly bewildered and half frightened her. As for me, I felt as one feels who suddenly gains the shelter of a roof after having been tormented by a blustering wind.

"You didn't expect me, did you? We found Mr. Whiffles, and so had no need to go on to W——. My dear Lucy, this is Mr. Whiffles," said father.

The stranger shook hands with my mother, and made her a bow. He was, I thought, a very odd-looking man. He was short and rather stout, with a very red, smooth face, closely shaven, and of one uniform tint from forehead to chin. He had very straight, thin hair, smoothly plastered down on his head. He was dressed in a jaunty short coat with a great number and variety of pockets, very tight-fitting fawn-colored trowsers, a waistcoat of the same stuff, with immense mother-of-pearl buttons, rather high shirt-collar, a bright blue neckerchief, with a great gold pin stuck in it, representing a horseshoe whereof the nails were rubies, a thick watch-chain festooned ostentatiously across his chest, and a stiff, tall, white hat. He had remarkably tight orange-colored gloves, beneath which several rings on his fingers bulged out conspicuously. When he spoke and said to mother, "Proud to know you, ma'am," I found he had a very hoarse voice. And when, on being presented to me, he said, in short sentences, "Glad to see you looking so well. You're looking remarkably well, Miss Furness. I really never saw you looking better in all my life!"—(which was less flattering to my present appearance than it might have been had he ever set eyes on me before that moment)—I made the further discovery that Mr. Whiffles had a queer nervous habit of giving his head a little shake—like the action of a person expressing a decisive negative—after each sentence, and then twitching his chin into its place again between his shirt-collars with two or three sharp jerks. I had no idea who he was, but I was experienced enough in the aspect of such people to feel convinced that he was in some way connected with the turf.

These observations were, of course, made much more rapidly than they are written. It all passed very quickly. Some word of introduction between Mr. Whiffles and Tilly was muttered out by my father. Sam he appeared to know, and acknowledged his presence by a little flapping action of his hand in the air, at the same time smiling and half closing his eyes.

In the confusion of finding places at the tea-table for the new-comers, I did not observe whether Tilly's reception of Mr. Whiffles were gracious or ungracious. But as soon as all were seated I perceived that, whatever might be her demeanor to the stranger, toward Mr. Lacer it was one of unconcealed hostility. She

happened to be seated opposite to him, and took great pains to look over his head, and to exhibit elaborate unconsciousness of his existence, checkered by occasional tossings of her head, and disdainful snortings leveled in his direction. I had expected to see her rise and go away on the arrival of her enemy. But curiosity, and a determination to keep a watch on Sam, caused her to remain.

It was a strangely assorted party. Father was in a fit of feverish high spirits, and talked a good deal. He laughed, too, at intervals. But it was not the laugh of old days. Ah, no! He kept a sort of watch on Mr. Whiffles, at first, whenever that person spoke to mother or me, as though a little doubtful of his behavior. I concluded that father had never seen Mr. Whiffles in the society of ladies before. Gervase Lacer was more taciturn than usual, and his manner was constrained and ill at ease—which, indeed, I did not wonder at. Heaven knows I was ill at ease enough myself! And yet I had an acute perception of the ludicrousness of many elements in the scene which amounted to pain. I could have broken out into ungoverned laughter, which would undoubtedly have ended in tears; or into copious weeping, which would have been likely enough to result in convulsive laughter. However, I did neither, but sat still, and nearly silent, beside my mother, with a face which I dare say appeared coldly composed.

During tea Mr. Whiffles addressed his conversation almost exclusively to us women. Nothing more plaintively admiring—so to speak—than Mr. Whiffles's manner, nothing more Arcadian than the tastes and sentiment Mr. Whiffles professed, can be imagined. He put his hand on his heart every time he declared that upon his word and honor there was nothing, you know, so delightfully soothing as the country, really! The country was the sweetest thing. The birds and the flowers and all that was so uncommonly delicious. Mingled with the society of ladies, what could a man wish for more? There was something soothing about the *mooring* of the cows, he considered. It made a man reflect upon the days of his childhood, you know. It did, upon his word and honor, really. And Mr. Whiffles's head was shaken, as though in mute involuntary protest, at the end of every sentence. It might have been objected to his style of conversation that it was monotonous, for he said the same things over and over again. And whenever his powers of entertainment appeared to flag for a moment he had recourse to assuring us three (mother, Tilly, and myself), with almost tearful fervor, that he had never in the whole course of his life seen us looking so uncommonly and remarkably well as we were looking at that moment.

But when the tea-things were cleared away, and my father ordered the spirit-bottles to be brought, and each of the men mixed for himself a tumblerful of whatsoever liquor he chose,

Mr. Whiffles, drawing his chair up near to my father's, launched into a more masculine strain of talk, to which we women could but listen submissively. Mr. Whiffles, however, changed the matter only, and in nowise the manner of his speech. It was still characterized by plaintiveness and monotony. There was nothing loud, boisterous, or rollicking about Mr. Whiffles.

It was painful to me, and might have been curious to any disinterested looker-on, to see my father hanging on this man's words, and drinking in his opinions, with an eagerness and deference which he would not now have shown for the highest wisdom that could have been uttered to him.

"She's a very sweet thing is Cock-a-hoop," said Mr. Whiffles, with melancholy tenderness, as he drank his brandy-and-water in a series of gulps. "I don't say any thing, mind you, about her present form. That ain't what it ought to be, nor yet what it *might* be. But she's a game disposition. That's what I look at in a race-oss. It wouldn't surprise *me* if she was to carry the money for the Two-Year-Old Stakes, mind you!"

"Aha! Indeed?" said my father, raising his eyebrows, and nodding twice or thrice.

"Well, Mr. Furness, there's no telling. The prophets and the backers were very sweet on her stable-companion, Coriolanus, and they were hignominiously defeated, as you well know. But, mind you, *I don't say they were wrong*. What *he* wanted was form. But he exhibited form last season, Sir, such as to justify every confidence his friends could put in him. And what *she* wants is form likewise. But she's a very sweet thing indeed, is Cock-a-hoop; and a gamer disposition, I'm free to confess, I should be troubled to point out among the two-year-olds."

"What do you think of Purity?" asked Mr. Lacer, leaning forward with his elbows on the table.

Mr. Whiffles gave a gentle sigh, followed by two or three convulsive twitches of the head, before he answered, with a sad smile, "Why, Captain Lacer, I suppose I think pretty well what every body that knows any thing of the turf *does* think of Purity. There's been a very industrious dodge to get him into the quotations lately. But it is seen through, Sir, and the speculators have peppered him unmercifully. No, no, Captain Lacer. My advice to any gentleman about to make a book would be, 'Have nothing to say to Purity on any terms, for he never has been a stayer, and he never will be,' and there don't exist the course in Great Britain and Ireland that he'd have a chance on!"

Mr. Whiffles went on in this strain for more than an hour, refreshing himself at intervals with brandy-and-water. No sage instructing his disciples in the precepts of virtue and wisdom could have shown more gravity and mild decorum of manner than did Mr. Whiffles, who

appeared, indeed, almost oppressed by the responsibilities of his high office of preacher and teacher.

Tilly Cudberry, meanwhile, sitting apart with mother and me, kept up a running commentary on Mr. Whiffles's utterances, chiefly by means of broken ejaculations, as thus: "Ha! Indeed, Sir? Very pretty! This is the sort of society you've come down to, Miss Cudberry of Woolling, is it? Poor George! These are *Mr. Lacer's* comrades and associates! That's nice sort of grammar to hear at your own first cousin's table, upon my word!" And so forth. But she also contrived to convey to mother that short-comings in the construction and pronunciation of the English language were by no means among the chief of her objections to Mr. Whiffles. Despite her bargain with her brother, Tilly could not resist the pleasure of dropping hints as to her own knowledge of certain mysterious transactions in which Mr. Lacer and Mr. Whiffles were engaged. And before she went away she advanced her lips near to mother's ear, and blurted out in something as near a whisper as her voice could compass:

"He's a most *dangerous* man! Horse-dealer! Did keep livery-stables. Now turned turf-agent and *tipster*, I believe. Has been acting as *private trainer*! What do you think of that?"

And what with the hurry and inarticulateness of her speech, and the unintelligibility to mother of the terms she used, Tilly left my mother with a mere vague, terrified impression on her mind, which was more painful than almost any explicit statement of the truth could have been.

Mr. Lacer and Mr. Whiffles presently withdrew together. They were going to lodge in Horsingham, so as to be ready for the morrow's races. Father said he would stroll part of the way with them, as it was a fine night. Mr. Whiffles took his leave, protesting to the last that he had experienced the purest joy at finding us looking so extraordinary well.

The voices of the three men had scarcely died away in the distance before mother turned to me with a pale, haggard face, and said:

"What is this, Anne, that Tilly Cudberry says about Mr. Lacer and about that man? You know something. I watched your face. And I saw Sam and Gervase Lacer exchange looks of intelligence also. Is there any fresh trouble? Don't try to deceive me, child. No good can come of that!"

Before we slept that night I had made a full confession to mother of all I had learned from Mr. Lacer.

CHAPTER XXX.

THAT week was passed by mother and me in a sort of dizzy apprehension. I think mother's state of mind must have been like that of some panting, hunted creature, conscious of

a swiftly coming doom. I used to see her watching the clock above the stable door, or the creeping shadows stealing over the garden, with strained eyes and blanched cheeks, as though she were counting the minutes. My birthday came and went without my thinking of it. But when I went to rest, I found a bunch of wild flowers on my pillow, wrapped in a paper on which was written, "God bless my dear child with many happy years."

Horsingham was full of strangers. It was a very "good race-week," the people said. There was no hint of our visiting the race-course. Father went there daily; but mother and I knew that the great die was to be cast on the Wednesday afternoon—the last day but one of the races.

The sunbeam that fell upon my eyes and woke me on that Wednesday morning seemed to pierce me like a sword. It is very dreadful to wake to a consciousness of care, and to tremble at the thought of what we must do and suffer when we shall have left the shelter of our bed. I have never wondered at unfortunate and unhappy people growing to be sluggards. When a wintry, arctic world awaits us without, it is natural to cling to the dull, warm, stupefying atmosphere of even an Esquimaux hut.

At about twelve o'clock my father made his appearance down stairs. The table was spread for his solitary breakfast—mother and I had had ours hours before—but he could scarcely eat any thing. He called for some beer, and drank off a tumbler of the foaming liquor feverishly. He kept glancing out of the window at the sky. It was a bright, warm day; but mother happening to mention that there had been some heavy showers in the night, he asked, quickly, was the ground soft? And presently went out and looked at the lawn, and put his foot on it to feel whether the earth were soaked.

At last the time came for him to set off.

Flower brought the gig round to the hall door, and stood at the horse's head while my father was taking leave of us. It was a very slight and short farewell. He scarcely spoke a word. He had been silent all the morning.

"Anne, will you give me that other driving-glove from the hall table? Thank you. Good-by, Lucy. Give him his head, Flower."

He was gone. He had just kissed mother's forehead, jumped into the gig, and driven off very fast without once looking round.

I turned to take mother's hand. She pressed mine fondly, but did not speak, and hurried away to her own room with averted head. In a moment I heard the door shut and locked on the inside.

I could neither read, nor sew, nor sit still and idle in the silent house. I threw a broad hat on, and went out into the sunny garden. But I had not been there many minutes before I longed for the shade and shelter of the house again. An unreasoning fit of fear took hold on me that I should see or hear something from the race-course. There were voices in

the road, of the throngs of people making for Horsingham; and the sound of them came in faint wafts to my ears, for they were a long way off. But I could not bear the tones in which my nervous fancy conjured up words and sentences about the great race. So I came back quietly to the house, and threw my hat off, and sank down, hot and panting, on a couch in the morning-room. And there I staid, half sitting, half reclining, with my arms folded on the square, old-fashioned pillow, and my head resting on my arms, hiding my face, and shutting out light and sound. And so at last I fell asleep. At first it was an uneasy doze; but I courted it, and remained as still as might be, trying neither to fear, nor to hope, nor to think, but to lull my mind into inaction; and so gradually, being young and healthy and weary, I sank into a deep, soft, dreamless slumber.

I was awakened by an agitated voice in my ear.

"Anne! Dear Anne! Are you not well? What is the matter?"

My first thought on waking was that it had been selfish of me to sleep there while mother was wrestling with anxiety and heart-sickening apprehension. I raised my head, and my eyes encountered Donald Ayrle's. He was bending over me, with a perplexed face.

"No, no," said I, hastily pushing my hair back from my flushed face. "I am quite well; but I—I could not read, and I was so tired, and the heat—I fell asleep."

"You look like the little Nancy who sat on Doctor Hewson's knee, and cried when I went away to school," said Donald, sitting down beside me, taking my hand, and looking with an inexpressible tenderness into my face. And then in a minute—I can not tell how or in what words it was conveyed—I knew that he loved me, and that he was asking me to be his wife. Two hours before I should have denied that I was aware of this feeling in him, and not denied untruly; but now that the words were spoken, it seemed to me that I had always known it; and when he said, "Anne, you must have seen how dearly I love you—I think I have loved you ever since we were children together"—I could utter no words of denial. I knew that I should be subjecting myself to an accusation of heartlessness and coquetry if I tacitly admitted that I had seen his love, and carelessly let it ripen, and then were to reject it after all. And at that moment hope and happiness were so out of tune with the dolorous strain of the life around me, that it seemed impossible to welcome them selfishly; and yet, for the life of me, I could not say a word.

"You did know it, Anne? It has seemed to me often as if any words of mine were needless to tell you how dear you are to me; and I have hoped that—that you felt this too. Won't you say a word, dearest?"

At this moment my mother opened the door, and stood looking at us. The contrast between her sorrow-worn face and Donald's, all aglow

with hope and youth, brought the hot tears to my eyes. I ran to her, and hid my face on her shoulder, crying,

"No, no; don't ask me. I can not, I can not."

If I could not make mother happy, I would be sorry with her. That was no time to bask in the sunshine of joyful love.

I sobbed bitterly, and without thinking of giving myself any account of my emotion. But now I believe—I know—that I was pitying myself for renouncing his true love more than I pitied Donald. And yet I was sorry for him from my heart. Truly I had the most claim to pity, for I was never so blind as not to know him for better, stronger, nobler than I. He lost a slighter thing in losing me than I renounced in turning away from him.

A hasty word or two explained the scene to my mother. She had been startled at first with the dread that Donald was the bearer of ill news from the race-course.

"Have *you* no word to say to me, Mrs. Furness?" asked Donald, looking at my mother. He was quite pale now, and the light had gone out of his face.

Mother was greatly agitated. She loved Donald with a true affection. But she had lost her nerve and the mild self-possession that had once made all her words ring full and true like sterling coin. She trembled and stammered, holding me circled in one arm, and nervously stroking my hair with the other hand, as I kept my face still hidden on her shoulder.

"Oh, Donald, what shall I say to you? I can not at this moment urge Anne to accept your suit. It would not be just. It would not—I fear it would be dishonorable. I—I— Do not press it now, dear Donald, I implore you."

I well understood that mother was thinking that it would be neither just nor honorable to tie Donald's lot to that of a girl whose father might be at that moment an utterly ruined and—worse, far worse—a *disgraced* man. But he took her words differently.

"I shall not urge her, Mrs. Furness, be very sure. Although it were my life I was begging of her, I could not take it from a grudging hand. *If* it were my life! It is more to me than the mere right to go on living. If Anne had loved me—"

He stopped as if the words choked him, and there was a moment's absolute dead silence, which seemed to last an hour. Then he proceeded—

"Let her do that which is 'just' and 'honorable.' I am sure she will. I wish her happy. There is no one to blame. I have been a fool, and believed what I wished."

"Donald, don't go so! Stay a moment—let me say a word!" cried mother, releasing me from her arms, and making a step forward.

"I can not. For God's sake don't stop me! Let me go into the air. I shall—die—if—I stay here."

I looked up at hearing the broken tones of his voice and his labored breathing. His chest was heaving as though it would burst. He struggled hard to command himself. As he ran out of the room I rushed to the window, and followed him with my eyes; and before he reached the bottom of the garden I saw him lean his forehead against a tree, and burst into a passion of convulsive sobs.

The sun sank and sank. The sounds of clattering hoofs and trampling feet and rolling wheels, and loud, boisterous, whooping voices, began to be heard from the road. Our meal remained almost untasted on the table. Mother and I sat hand in hand, and gradually ceased all poor pretense of encouraging each other by words, and sank into silence. And thus we waited, waited, waited in the darkening room.

CHAPTER XXXI.

It was quite dark before we heard the sound of wheels upon the gravel of the drive. The maid had brought the lamp into the room, but mother had bidden her shade it, and leave it on a side-table. We kept the windows open, partly because it was a close, sultry night, and partly that we might hear the sound of the gig's approach. A large, weird-looking moth flew in and fluttered and wheeled about the light, and, striking itself now and then against the glass globe, made a sound at which we started, and our pulses throbbed painfully. There was no other sound. Not a twig moved in the garden. The noises had died away in the road. There was, doubtless, some roistering mirth rife in Horsingham, but out there in the country all was brooding heat, darkness, and silence.

"Can you not catch the foolish creature?" said my mother, nervously twitching the fingers I held in mine, as the moth struck itself against the lamp with a dull thud. "It will be scorched. Put it out into the air."

Mother spoke almost in a whisper. I rose to obey her, trying to catch the insect in my handkerchief, when at that moment we heard the sound of wheels.

"Anne, he is coming!" said mother, very faintly. Her face was ashy pale, and she leaned back on the sofa like one in mortal sickness.

It seems strange to me now to remember that before I ran to her I carefully enveloped the moth, with a sudden stealthy movement, in my handkerchief, carried him to the window, and shook him out into an unseen odorous garden-bed.

"Shall I go to the door?" I asked, standing close by my mother, but not touching her, and clasping my hands tightly together.

"Let Sarah open the door. He might be vexed at your going."

There was a short pause, more intolerable,

as it seemed at the moment, than all the hours of waiting we had gone through, before the doorbolts were withdrawn. Then we heard voices, the stamping of hoofs, and Flower crying, angrily, "Woa then! We-e-y, lass! Damn thee, can't thee stand still half a second, thou cursed fidgety brute, thou!" And then a long string of muttered oaths and blasphemies, which died away, mingled with the noise of the vehicle being driven round to the stable-yard.

Footsteps came heavily along the hall, and the door of the room in which we were was flung roughly open.

"Thank God, you've got home all safe, darling George! I was beginning to be almost weary," exclaimed my mother. She spoke quite strongly, even cheerfully, and advanced toward my father, and put her hand on his shoulder. In her great pity and undying love for him she found strength to show him a brave, bright face in the first moment of his return. Let fate do its worst, he should have nothing but comfort from *her*. But my father seemed scarcely conscious of her voice or of her touch. He stumbled strangely, and fell heavily into a chair.

Gervase Lacer had entered with him, and his eyes met mine as I looked up at him in surprise at father's demeanor and aspect; but he glanced away, and did not support my gaze for an instant.

"I think," he said, hurriedly, "that you might as well send the servant-girl to bed. She can't do any good. Get her out of the way."

Then the truth flashed upon me that my father was intoxicated. I had never seen him so before in all my life. I glanced at mother, and saw in the anguish of her white face that she perceived it also.

"Lucy," muttered father, in a thick voice, and taking her hand in his, "you mustn't be cast down, my girl! Lucy—there's—there's been foul play. Damned foul play. But Whiffles, Lucy—Whiffles is a trump. We shall—we shall smash 'em next time. I have friends. Lacer is my friend. Whiffles is my friend. Lucy—h'sh! it's a secret. The bay colt 'll astonish them yet. Ha, ha, ha!"

He burst into a discordant laugh which made us shiver. Then all at once his heavy eyes became aware of me—they had rested on me before, but apparently without seeing me—and he said, still in the same thick tones, but with an altered manner, "Take her away, Lucy! Take the child away! She—she mustn't see this."

But all the while he held his wife's hand in one of his; and with the other he presently began to loosen his cravat, tearing it off with uncertain, helpless fingers. By-and-by his head drooped forward on his arms, which rested on the table in front of him—he still holding mother's hand, and drawing her down until she knelt on the floor beside him, although he continued to murmur, "Go away, and take the child, Lucy. Take the child. She mustn't see

this." But soon his fingers relaxed their hold, and released her, and he fell into a stupor rather than a sleep.

None of us spoke a word until his heavy breathing had lasted some minutes. Then Mr. Lacer whispered to me once more to send the girl to bed. I went into the kitchen to dismiss her, and found her nodding and blinking sleepily beside a flaring candle. She was thankful to be allowed to go to bed. She had not bolted the kitchen door, Flower not having yet returned from putting the mare up in the stable. I told her that I would see to the fastenings of the house, and dismissed her up stairs.

When I went back into the sitting-room I found that father was partially aroused from his sleep, although he was far from being in full possession of his consciousness.

Mother's face looked rigid as stone, and her eyes unnaturally bright. Her force and courage amazed me. She spoke in a firm, steady voice.

"George, dearest, you must go to rest. We will talk together in the morning. We are all tired now. It is late."

"Lacer," stammered my father, letting his clenched fist fall heavily on the table—"Lacer—you're my friend. Are you or are you not my friend? Will you back the—the bay colt, to run against the field—the *field*, I say! Every horse! Every jockey—cursed swindlers! We'll—we'll *train a jockey ourselves*. H'sh! Wait a while! H'sh, h'sh, h'sh! It's a secret. But if the bay colt doesn't smash them all—you may poison him! Ha, ha, ha! you may poison—no, you may poison *me*, my boy! That would be the best. Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"

Again came that dreadful drunken laugh, which this time ended in a hoarse gasp; and he tore his shirt open as though he were choking. Then looking at me with a strange, vacant stare, he mumbled out once more, "Take away the child, Lucy. Take—take her away. She mustn't see this;" and then dropped his head again, hiding his face on his folded arms.

At a sign from mother I withdrew into a distant part of the room, standing behind my father, so that he could not see me. Then she bent over him and kissed his hair—the once bright curling hair she had been so proud of, now grizzled and dank and tangled and uncared for—and coaxed him and prayed him to be comforted and go to his rest.

"Come, Furness! Do as your wife wishes," said Mr. Lacer, taking hold of father's arm. Mr. Lacer's voice roused him somewhat. He made an effort to raise his head and steady himself.

"My wife!" he cried. "A good wife, Lacer! An angel! The sweetest woman—the sweetest woman in the world, I say! Poor Lucy! my poor girl!"

Here he began to moan weakly, and fell into a fit of sobbing, although only a few stray tears

rolled slowly down his cheeks. Mother ran to take his hand, and kiss it; but he pushed her from him with the action of a peevish child, and murmuring that no one cared for him; that he was alone; that he had done all for others, and that they never believed him, never had any confidence in him; and alternately calling all men to witness that his luck had been infernal, and chuckling over the sure success of a new project which must be kept secret—secret as the grave—he gradually suffered Mr. Lacer to lead him to his chamber.

Mother sat quite still, with her two hands pressed upon her temples, staring blankly out into the darkness. I did not dare to speak to her. I scarcely dared to breathe or move. A strange feeling was upon me, which made me dread to break the stillness; a feeling as of a climber on a steep precipice, whom a panic fear suddenly unnerves, and who, incapable of making a step backward or forward, clings with clenched hands to the spot whereon he finds himself. So we remained silent until Mr. Lacer came back.

"He is asleep," he said, seating himself with his face in shadow, and leaning his head upon his hand. "He fell asleep immediately."

There was a pause.

"I need not ask—I will spare you the pain of trying to break it to me. Every thing is lost," said my mother, in a low voice.

"Every thing."

"I knew it."

But although she had, in truth, anticipated his answer, it gave her a blow when it came. Hope strikes many fibrous roots into the heart; and I think mother had scarcely known that any still lurked in hers, until she learned it by the pain of having it torn out.

Mr. Lacer began trying to explain to us how it had come to pass that the race had been so disastrous for father. I gathered little from his explanation beyond the fact that there had been fraud, and lying, and swindling; tampering with trusted agents, bribing, spying, villainy. "Our" horse had been beaten. But even that would not have involved utter ruin, if the favorite had won. "At the last moment I got Furness to hedge, so as to save something out of the fire, if only that cursed beast had got first to the winning-post." But the favorite too had been ignominiously beaten. Accusations of foul play had been in every mouth. The horses had returned to weigh in, surrounded by a mob of yelling and infuriated ruffians. One man had been roughly handled, and only escaped worse injury—perhaps death—by the protection of a gang of hired pugilists, with whom he had providently surrounded himself. There had been a fearful uproar, and one that was remembered in Horsingham for many a year afterward.

Mr. Lacer grew heated at the recollection of the scene. More than one deep, angry curse had escaped him, when mother shudderingly put up her hand to stop him. He ceased speaking on her gesture. But after a second or two

he said, excitedly, "You know, Mrs. Furness, how I feel for you. I do, on my soul! But you must forgive me if I don't stop to pick my words like a young lady. I have been badly hit, too. This has been a black day for me."

"You too!" cried mother. Then she made a moan, wringing her hands, and murmuring, "What a curse this is! what a curse!" and rocking herself backward and forward.

Then—for he was genuinely sorry for her—he took back his words in a measure, and tried to comfort her. Though things were bad, they were, perhaps, not so desperate after all! For himself, he should tide over it. And Furness—if Furness could only get away out of the place—clean away—good luck might come back to him. She (mother) must be firm. *All* was not lost, so long as she was stanch.

Mother was walking up and down the room, with her hands again pressed to her temples, and made no answer. I doubt whether she heard what Mr. Lacer was saying. Then he turned to me, and spoke very earnestly, and said that I, too, must be firm, and not yield to the pressure of misfortune which might be frightened away by a brave front. Weak yielding never did any good. He insisted much on the necessity of our being *firm*. I did not understand the full purport of his words until afterward.

"Why did you let George drink?" said mother, stopping all at once with a strange sudden flash of anger, and disregarding what Mr. Lacer was saying to me. "You might, at least, have let him come home to us in his senses! Am I to have *that* horror? It would be the worst of all. I would rather beg barefoot by his side than see him degraded in that way. You don't know what George was. You have never seen him at his best, as *we* knew him. Such a frank, upright, manly nature! I thought my heart would break when I found—" She ceased, unwilling to finish her sentence, and walked wildly up and down the room again.

Gervase Lacer looked startled at first by this outburst, but he answered with a gentleness and forbearance that moved me. He assured mother that he had had no power to prevent her husband from drinking. A knot of men had gathered round him, losers like himself. Furness had been so excited and upset by the whole scene on the race-course that he scarcely seemed to know what he was doing.

"I could not get him away from them, Mrs. Furness," he said. "How was it possible that I should have done so? But I stuck by him. I was determined not to leave him until he was safe at home. And God knows I dreaded facing you and Anne. But I thought I was acting a friend's part. I could do no more."

Mother gave him her hand, and piteously begged his pardon. "I'm half distracted, I think," she said. "But to see George in that state—You don't know what it is to me. No poverty could be so bitter, nor half so bitter. I have always been so—so—proud of him!"

Her lips trembled, and she burst into tears. It was almost a relief to see them. Her dry-eyed misery had been terrible to me. I signed to Mr. Lacer not to speak, and he stood watching her uneasily, as she sobbed with her face hidden in her hands. I did not approach her. I felt that it was best to refrain from speech at that moment. There was not antagonism, but division between us. Mother knew with her quick instinct of affection that even while I pitied my father—and God knows that I did pity him—I felt resentment against him at sight of her suffering. It was so. I could not help the feeling.

I had not forgotten that I had undertaken to see to the fastenings of the house. The kitchen door had been left open, and there was no reliance to be placed on Flower. In all likelihood he had come home in a state of drunkenness, as was his wont—a state in which, however, he seemed always to possess a mechanical power of attending to his stable duties. Flower had never been known to neglect a horse, father was accustomed to boast in speaking of the man.

I explained my errand in a word or two, and taking up a small lamp which had been left burning in the hall, I made for the kitchen.

In a moment I heard Mr. Lacer's footsteps following me, and I stopped, and turned, and bade him go back; I was not frightened. He pressed on after me, however, saying that it was not safe to let me do such an office alone at that late hour. I made no further remonstrance, but went straight into the kitchen, being bent on getting my errand accomplished as quickly as might me. The large, stone-flagged kitchen was empty and silent. All was undisturbed there. But the door, as I had conjectured to be likely, was left unbarred.

"Flower has gone to bed, and thought or cared nothing about the safety of the house," I said, bending down and using all my strength to move the heavy bolt that grated dolefully through the silent house. But Mr. Lacer bade me let him do it, and took my hand to remove it from the bolt, as I thought; but on a sudden he stooped, and kissed my fingers lightly—almost timidly.

I turned on him, drawn to my full height, startled and flushed and indignant.

"Please to fasten the door, or let me do it. I must return to my mother."

Then he burst out with a kind of suppressed vehemence, clasping his hands tightly together with the action of one forcibly restraining himself from demonstrative gestures.

"Anne, don't be angry with me! You can't suppose I meant to offend you? I would die sooner than offend you. But I must say now what is in my heart—"

"No, no! Say no more! *Pray* say no more!"

"I *must* speak, Anne. I do not ask for an answer at this moment. But I can not leave you to-night without telling you that—that nothing can alter my love for you. Oh, Anne, if

you would give me the right to love and cherish you, I would devote my life to making you happy."

Now that he had spoken, I felt strangely self-possessed. My agitation seemed to have fled. I answered him with a tremor in my voice, but scarcely any at my heart. "This is no time to speak of—of love to me. I can think only of *them*. You must know that it is so—must be so! I am not ungrateful. But you, too, are excited and unstrung. You are speaking from overwrought feeling—sympathy."

"Oh, stop, for God's sake! I can't bear that!" he cried, starting back from me as if I had stung him.

"I do not mean to hurt you, indeed! It would be heartless and ungrateful beyond measure. But I know that I ought not to accept seriously what you say now in a generous impulse of pity."

Again he interrupted me, this time gripping my wrist until the pressure of his fingers hurt me.

"I tell you I can't bear it, Anne! Don't, for God's sake, talk of my—*my* generosity!"

After a moment's pause he resumed more calmly, "I love you better than I ever did or shall love any mortal woman. Believe that, Anne, whatever happens. If I had known you sooner— But it is not too late. It shall not be too late. Cast in your lot with me, Anne. We are in the same boat."

"Nay! *Our* boat has made shipwreck. Keep out of it."

"I tell you, Anne, that we will sink or swim together."

He tried to take my hand again, but I drew back.

"You are not angry, Anne?" he said.

"Angry! No; I am not angry. I feel that it is generous of you to come forward at this moment of trouble and misery."

"I could not leave you to-night, dearest, without telling you that all the trouble only makes you dearer to me. I held my tongue while you were the prosperous heiress of Water-Eardley. But *now* I can speak without my sincerity and disinterestedness being suspected."

This jarred on me. I wished he had not said it. "Pray," said I, "let us speak no more of this to-night. Let me go to mother. She is, and ought to be, my first consideration."

"But *you* are mine, Anne! First and best and dearest. There, I will not try to detain you. I will press for no answer now. I have eased my heart by speaking. Think of me a little kindly if you can."

We returned to the sitting-room, where mother was standing at the open window.

"How close and heavy it is!" she murmured, without turning her head, as she heard us enter. "Not a breath stirring! Is the house secured?"

We told her that it was so. And then Mr. Lacer took his leave.

"You must walk? It is late. You have

no apprehension? Our road is generally safe enough. But at this time—"

"Apprehension! None whatever. People will be about all night long. And, though it is late for Water-Eardley, it is really not such a terrible hour. It wants half an hour to midnight. God bless you, Mrs. Furness! I will be here betimes in the morning."

He went away into the sultry darkness.

I was so weary that I thought I must fall asleep the instant my head touched the pillow. But as soon as I was in my bed I was haunted and haunted by troops of thoughts and fears and fancies that rushed through my brain and broke my rest.

Only as the dawn began to glimmer through my window did I fall asleep. And I woke with a violent start, as if I had been struck, when the sun was high.

CHAPTER XXXII.

I WAS first in the breakfast-room; but mother presently stole down stairs, white and noiseless as a ghost.

"Your father is asleep," she said, almost in a whisper, although his room was far out of ear-shot. "I have no heart to disturb him. It is better that he should sleep."

In truth, we both dreaded the moment when, awaking from the heavy stupor that steeped him in forgetfulness, he should live to the full consciousness of all that had happened yesterday.

I persuaded mother to take some tea. For a long time she refused to attempt to eat, saying that she felt as if food would choke her. But I finally succeeded in getting her to swallow a few mouthfuls, on the plea that if she broke down and fell ill it would be an overwhelming blow for father. I told her, as we sat at the breakfast-table, what Gervase Lacer had said to me last night. She leaned her head on her hand, and looked at me thoughtfully. "I expected this," she said. "What answer did you make him?"

"I told him that I could make him none at that time, mother," I replied, casting down my eyes under her gaze.

"Do you love him, Anne?"

"Love him! I—I—don't know, mother."

"My darling, I have watched him closely, and I am afraid—afraid that he is not good enough for my Anne."

"Oh, mother!"

"It is not foolish mother's fondness that makes me say so, nor any prejudice against Gervase. I like him. He is genial and kind—"

"I am sure, mother," I broke in, "that we have reason to like him, and to be grateful to him."

She made no answer.

"Is it not generous and noble on his part to ask me to be his wife at the very moment when—when loss and trouble have fallen upon us?"

"Do you think he is the only one that could be so generous? Love does not reckon and balance in that way."

"I can not be insensible or unmoved by it, mother."

"That is pity and gratitude. Gervase is too chameleon-like. He has no holdfast in himself. He takes his colors from those he is with, and sways backward and forward weakly."

"He has been steadfast enough to father," I said, with a little touch of indignation; for I thought she was hard on Gervase.

"Against what temptation to be otherwise? His is just the nature to flatter itself that it is devoted to friendship at the very moment it is simply following the current of its own inclinations. But I will not vex you, my child. If you loved him indeed—"

She stopped and returned my glance with a wan half smile. "No, Anne; you do not love him. Ah, no, no, no! If you loved him, I should be anxious and uneasy. Many things would conspire to make me so—things that I am only now beginning to see in their true light. But as it is—hard! Was that your father's bell? Is he stirring yet?"

Mother glided out of the room and up the stairs with a light, stealthy tread.

The idea of my father's waking, and all that it involved, came to banish, in a measure, the thoughts called up by the conversation that had just come to an end. They remained in abeyance, as it were. I listened breathlessly for a long time. There was no sound to be heard up stairs. Mother must have been mistaken, I thought. I stole up to the door of my parents' chamber. It was open, and I entered softly. Father was up and dressed, sitting by a little table on which he leaned his elbows, while his face was hidden in his hands. A cup of tea stood untasted beside him. Mother was bending over him, with her hand upon his head. She looked up as I entered, but said no word.

Presently my father groaned aloud. "Go away and leave me, Lucy. I am a wretch. You can never forgive me. You must hate me."

"Oh, George, if you knew what a knife you plunge into my heart when you say so! Though I know, darling, you don't mean it—yet I can not bear to hear the words."

"I do mean it. You must hate me. You ought to hate me."

"Hate you, my own one! Oh, George, George! if I could hate you, whom should I love?"

"Those who have done you good, and not evil—who have not ruined and disgraced you and your child—your father." And he groaned again in his misery. It was the first time that he had voluntarily mentioned my grandfather for many a long day, and I noted it.

"You know, George," returned mother, with a quiet air of conviction, "that you are the first and dearest in the world to me. It would be

late in the day for you to begin to doubt that, or for me to protest it."

"So much the worse for you, my poor girl! So much the worse—so much the worse."

Mother took up the cup and offered it to his parched lips. "Take some tea, dear George," she said. "It will do you good."

He turned away with a gesture of disgust. "Pah!" he exclaimed; "I can't touch it. I can't touch any thing, unless— Get me some brandy." He saw me standing hesitatingly just within the door, as he turned his head away from the cup mother was proffering to him, and fixed a haggard gaze on me.

What a face it was that I saw! White, with burning eyes and stubbly beard, and wild, unkempt hair! Father seemed to have grown ten years older since yesterday.

"Is that you, Anne?" he said, hoarsely. "Poor lass! It is a hard thing to have to be ashamed of thy father."

"Ashamed!" echoed my mother, fixing a kindling eye on me as though to prompt me to protest against the word. But I was tongue-tied. I *could* not utter a syllable.

"Ay, Lucy, ashamed. The girl would fain tell a lie and deny it, but she can not. You may thank God for that, Lucy. I mind the time when *I* could not have told a lie to save my life. Oh-h-h!"

He uttered a long-drawn, quivering sigh, partly extorted by bodily pain; for as he closed his heavy eyelids and pressed his hands to his brow, it was easy to see that he was suffering from a racking headache.

"Won't you try to take any thing, my darling?" said mother, in a coaxing tone. "And let me bathe your forehead. There—so. That's my own dear. Poor, burning forehead!"

She drew his head on to her breast as if he had been a child, and steeped her handkerchief in some sweet waters and laid it on his brow. Father remained passive for a second or two. Then his broad, strong chest began to heave, and the great veins stood out on his forehead like cords, and he burst into a terrible passion of tears. Terrible it was—very terrible to me, to see the powerful man's frame gasping and struggling, and to hear his laboring sobs.

"Oh, Lucy, Lucy, you are an angel from heaven! Oh, my poor, gentle Lucy! I—shall—die," he said, in a hoarse whisper, and drawing a long gasping breath between every two or three words.

Mother made a sign for me to go away. As I closed the door I saw her kneel down on the floor and put her arms round my father, and I heard the murmur of her voice lavishing every fond and loving epithet upon him she could think of, and beseeching him to be comforted.

Down stairs I found Mr. Lacer, who had just arrived. He asked for my father, and how Mrs. Furness was this morning, in nearly his ordinary tone. Then he looked at me wistfully, and said:

"How I wish, my dearest, that it were any

comfort to you to know that I love you better than all the world besides! That your happiness and welfare are the dearest wish of my heart! Well, Anne, I will say no more at this moment if it distresses you. But—you will owe me some kindness for my patience, Anne? Throw me a crumb or two of hope to live on, won't you? Not even a kind look?"

This tone was distasteful to me. And as I felt that it was so—as I shrank away from the hand he stretched forth to take mine, mother's words came into my head: "You don't love him, Anne. Ah, no, no, no!" I own to a perverse vexation on remembering them. I was unreasonable, irritable, and altogether out of tune. But I made a struggle to conceal, if I could not overcome, the feeling.

Mr. Lacer began to move restlessly about the room. Now looking out of the window into the flower-garden; now idly fluttering the leaves of some books of prints that lay on the side-table. Where was my father? Was he not coming down? A headache? Well, some soda-water and brandy would cure that, and the fresh air; or, if not cured, it must be endured. Time was precious, and the morning was slipping away.

"What is there to be done that is so pressing? Must my father go into Horsingham?" I asked.

"Yes, yes; he must go, of course. And so must I. I have appointments with—several people. And this is the last race-day, and the Horsingham Plate will be run for at three—" Mr. Lacer checked himself, and turned away abruptly to the window.

"Oh, you are not going—father is not going again to that dreadful race-course?"

"I don't suppose Furness need show there."

"But you? Are you going?"

"I *must*!" he answered, sharply, and with an impatient frown on his face.

A week ago I should have remonstrated against this resolution. Now I felt it was impossible for me to assume any privilege of intimate friendship with Gervase Lacer. His sternness displeased me less than his tenderness. And again mother's words rang in my ears: "You do not love him, Anne. Ah, no, no, no!"

"I wish," said I, after a minute's pause, "that grandfather were here."

Gervase turned quickly, and asked, with eagerness, "Has Doctor Hewson been here? When did you see him last?"

"He has not been at Water-Eardley for many weeks. Mother spoke of sending for him. But she feared it might displease my father if she did so without consulting him. And now, less than ever, would she dream of disregarding father's wishes. So she waited until she should be able to ask him about it, and hear what he would say."

"She was right. She was quite right."

"I should like grandfather to be at hand on her account. But self is her last consideration always."

"I trust that I should wish that which was best for her and you. But—I have no reason to desire Doctor Hewson's presence for my own sake."

"You? Why not?"

"He is an enemy of mine—or, at least, no friend."

I was taken by surprise, and felt that I flushed and stammered as I tried to combat this assertion. I had a secret conviction that it was true, although I could not in the least tell how I had arrived at the conviction.

"I do not think grandfather ever saw you in his life. How can he be your enemy? *Enemy!* Grandfather is too just and too sensible to entertain a baseless prejudice. And why should he be prejudiced against one who—who has shown such friendship for my parents?"

"H'm!" muttered Mr. Lacer, with closed lips, and tapping his foot impatiently on the floor. "But did it never strike you, Anne, that Doctor Hewson might not be disposed to like one who cherished a warmer feeling than friendship for your parents' daughter?"

"How could he know—?" I began, hastily, and left my sentence unfinished.

"Ha!" Then you think that if he *did* know he would not approve? So think I. You need not try to deny it, Anne. It is no news to me."

"But—"

"And as to knowing—why, do you suppose all Horsingham does not know that I am your suitor?"

"All Horsingham," I answered, coldly, "concerns itself very little with me or my affairs, I am confident." But though I spoke coldly, my heart was throbbing painfully, and I felt some hot tears well up into my eyes. All my shy pride was in arms at the idea thus abruptly presented to me of having furnished food for vulgar gossip, and of my name having been bandied from mouth to mouth accompanied by comments and speculations and suppositions, whereof the most good-natured would have been humiliating in my eyes. I do not justify this over-sensitive pride. I merely faithfully record it.

I think he perceived that he had vexed me, for he said that he would go round to the stable-yard and hasten Flower in putting the horse into the gig, and by the time the vehicle was ready he supposed that father also would be ready to accompany him to Horsingham. And so left me.

Presently my father and mother came down stairs. Father was ready to go, he said. The servant had brought him word that Mr. Lacer was waiting for him. But in a very few minutes Mr. Lacer came hurrying into the house declaring that he could not find Flower, and that the two women-servants said they had not seen him that morning.

Father was sitting huddled together on the sofa, holding his hat in his hand. He scarcely raised his eyes at Mr. Lacer's intelligence.

"Is the mare in the stable?" asked my mother. Yes; the mare was safe in the stable, but Flower was nowhere to be seen.

"It's my belief the fellow has bolted," exclaimed Mr. Lacer. Father muttered something about a falling house, and the rats flying from it; but neither rose nor moved.

"Well, what is to be done? We must get into Horsingham somehow," cried Mr. Lacer, after standing irresolutely for a few seconds looking from one to the other. "If you will tell me where to find the harness, I'll put the horse into the gig myself."

"Is it absolutely necessary that you should go to Horsingham this morning?" I asked.

Mr. Lacer looked at my father as though expecting him to answer. But as father remained passive in the same bowed, despondent attitude, Mr. Lacer replied himself, with some heat, "I have told you that it is absolutely necessary for me. As to Furness, he must do as he pleases. But I should think there can be no doubt about his having to show. I took it for granted. I came out here on purpose to accompany him to town. You can tell Mrs. Furness and your daughter whether or not you ought to go, can't you?" he added, turning to my father with an impatient shrug. I felt that his impatience was justified. After all, he was here on our business—to serve us.

"I *must* go," said father, rising up from the sofa. He followed Mr. Lacer slowly from the room.

"George—George, darling! say 'good-by!'" cried my mother from the window, as the two men passed through the garden on their way to the stable-yard. Father stopped, turned, hesitated. Mother held out an imploring hand to him, and he came straight up to the open window, raised his tall figure to its full height, and, taking mother in his arms, pressed his lips to her forehead.

"Oh, Lucy, Lucy," he murmured, "how much better for you, my poor, dear lass, if this was the last 'good-by,' and you could be quit of me!"

He was gone before she could say a word. Mother's face was blanched to a deadlier white than it had worn that morning; and as she withdrew her head into the room again she shivered from head to foot, although the hot sunshine had been pouring its rays directly upon her.

I stole up to her side and took her hand. She returned the pressure of mine, but we did not speak for some time. There was still that shade between us to which I have alluded; for although it had never for a moment entered my thoughts to utter a reproach against my father, she knew that reproaches were in my heart—that my yearning compassion for her almost implied a reproach to him who had caused her so to suffer. This same slight shade between us had not been lessened by our conversation about Gervase Lacer. It seemed to me that mother's devotion to her husband made her unjust toward her husband's friend, and that she accepted Gervase's good offices with scant gratitude.

"Do you know what father has been obliged to go to Horsingham for, mother dear?" I asked at length.

"To meet the men who have claims on him," she answered, briefly.

"The—the tradesmen?"

"No, no, child—the men he has lost money to. My poor darling—my poor George! He who was afraid to look no man in the face. And now— He dreaded meeting these people so. He told me that he was going with a feeling of death at his heart."

"But he will be able to meet these claims?"

"If we sell the clothes off our backs, they shall be met! Surely there is property enough here to suffice. I told him that there is no sacrifice we will shrink from to save him from disgrace and humiliation. We will blot out the past—and forget it."

"And then, mother dearest, if we go away to some distant place, and begin life anew—"

"Yes, yes; that is what I told him. I begged him to look *forward*. You would not repine, my Anne?"

"I should thank God with all my heart for any change that promised you peace of mind."

"And peace of mind for father. You must pray God for dear father."

"And for dear father."

"That's my precious treasure!" cried mother, throwing her arms around me and pressing me to her breast. "Poor, dear, dear father! He loves you so, Anne. You were always his pet from a baby. He thought more of you than of any of the little ones that were born before you—more even than of our blessed little Harold. Do you know, Anne, that he wears a little flaxen lock of hair, like the down of a wee yellow fledgeling, that was cut off your head when you were two years old; and now look at the thick dark brown tresses! Well, father wears that flaxen baby hair in a little plain locket on his breast. He is so proud of you, Anne; and it would break his heart to believe that you no longer loved him."

The tears were pouring down her cheeks. But the constraint which had fettered her tongue was broken, and she talked, and wept, and eased her poor aching heart. And after a while she grew very calm, and I saw with thankfulness that her face had quite lost the rigid, stony look it had worn since last night.

"And will you not send to grandfather?" I asked. "Did you speak to father about doing so?"

"Yes; I said a few words. George had a confused idea that he had heard that my father was absent from Horsingham. But I will write to him. After to-day, when your father is more settled, he will meet your grandfather, and talk with him."

Then I coaxed mother to take a little stroll with me in the shade of the trees by the riverside meadows. The whole place was steeped in peace and sunshine. Not a creature was to be seen. Every one who could get leave was

away at the race-course. We had no fear of coming upon Flower's insolent face. He was gone, it seemed, for good. I thought afterward that we had all taken his desertion with much indifference. It had scarcely caused even surprise. But we had no emotion to spare for Flower. The only sensation his absence caused in me was one of relief. And I believe mother felt as I did.

The sweet influence of the country sights and sounds, and of the serene autumn day, came down upon us despite of all.

Before we returned to the house mother and I had actually begun building castles in the air, to be inhabited in the new days that lay before us.

As we crossed the flower-garden we had a glimpse of a hired fly from Horsingham driving quickly up the avenue that led to the front-door. A hired fly was so unusual an apparition at our gates that we both stopped in surprise to look at it. As we did so the vehicle stopped also. Mr. Lacer jumped out of it, and ran toward us.

"Don't be frightened!" he cried, breathlessly; for mother was alarmed and trembling.

"George?" she exclaimed. "Where is George?"

"He's quite well. He's all right. I left him in Horsingham. There's nothing the matter, on my word. But I—I want to say a word to you and Anne."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"A FRESH trouble?" said my mother, seating herself in the little sitting-room, in the place where father had sat last night. She clasped her hands and leaned them on the table before her. Mr. Lacer placed himself opposite to her, and I sat down on the sofa by her side.

"No, not a fresh trouble," answered Mr. Lacer. "At least it need not be one, if you are collected and firm, as I am sure you will be."

He spoke eagerly, and yet with a certain embarrassment and abstraction, as though he had something to say which it was not easy to put into words, and were casting about in his mind how to say it.

"A trouble that it is in *my* power to avert!" exclaimed mother, with an incredulous shake of the head.

"Exactly. Yes, it is entirely in your power, and Anne's, to avert it," answered Mr. Lacer, catching at her words.

We sat silent and expectant.

"The fact is—" began Mr. Lacer, and then stopped, and began to pull to pieces a flower he wore in his button-hole. All at once he looked up with an air of decision. "Yes," he muttered, "there's no time to be lost. I must come to the point at once, Mrs. Furness. Your husband's liabilities are very heavy—very heavy indeed. Of course you were prepared to hear that. Race-horses are not bought and

trained for nothing. And then he has had the devil's own luck, poor Furness! Well, now a way of meeting those liabilities has been suggested—by Whiffles and others—and I started off without loss of time to—to warn you, you know, and to beg you on *no* account to consent to it. Though I'm sure—quite confident—that your own sense would tell you to resist."

"Resist!" echoed my mother, quietly. She kept her eyes fixed on his face, and a little faint color flushed up into her cheek as she spoke that one word, and then it faded, and she sat pale and still again.

"Yes, resist. If not for your own sake—I'm afraid that wouldn't weigh with you—for your daughter's."

The color rose again, more brightly this time, in mother's face, and she put her hand out and took mine, but without withdrawing her eyes from Mr. Lacer's face.

"Well," said the latter, a little impatiently, "I suppose you can guess what it is that has been suggested?"

"I am very ignorant and inexperienced in business matters—more so, I'm afraid, than most women," answered mother, humbly.

"Pray explain to me, as simply as possible—"

"Oh, it is simple enough. You are only to be asked to give up your marriage settlement."

The hand that held mine tightened its grasp with a start, but mother did not yet look at me. I remained perfectly still.

"Give up—! But *can* I?" asked mother, in a trembling voice.

"Can you, indeed? You may well ask, dear Mrs. Furness. The notion is a preposterous one. I was sure you would feel it to be so."

But though the words were confident, the tone in which Mr. Lacer said them was by no means so. He kept giving quick, restless glances at me, and pulling the stalk of the flower, from which the petals had long disappeared, into long fibrous strips.

"No; but I mean—*can* I? Have I the power to do this? I thought that a settlement was binding—irrevocable."

"In your case it can be done—could be done," he said, hastily, correcting his phrase, "with your daughter's consent. Anne is of age."

"Three days ago."

"But of course I need not point out to you the folly—the madness, I may say—of such a course. It would leave you utterly without any provision. It is not to be thought of."

"You know," said mother, slowly, "that George has the hope—almost the certainty, indeed—of a situation in Scotland?"

"In Scotland!"

"Did he not tell you of it? You know, at all events, that he has for some time past been thinking of giving up this place, and seeking employment?"

"Yes, I know that."

"Through my father's influence such a place

as we were looking for has been found for George—through my father's influence, and that of a dear young friend of his, Donald Ayrle."

Mr. Lacer's face changed, and a lowering expression came over it which I had never seen there before. "Oh!" he exclaimed, shortly.

"So that, you see," pursued mother, still in the same slow, quiet manner, "we should not be destitute even if—the settlement were to be given up."

"Good Heavens, Mrs. Furness, you don't mean to say you contemplate such a step!"

"It does not rest with me," answered mother; and with that she relinquished my hand, and rose and walked to the window, where she stood with her back to us, looking into the garden.

"Anne!" cried Mr. Lacer, "*you* surely understand that this would be fatal—simply fatal."

"Fatal to whom?" I asked, in a low voice. I saw in mother's attitude, in the turn of her head, in the tension of the hand which leaned on the window-sill, that she was listening with a painful concentration of attention. But she remained with her back to us, looking out into the garden.

"Fatal to whom? Fatal to all! Only think of it! Why, it seems too absurd to argue the thing."

"What did my father say? How did he receive the proposition?" I saw the hand upon the window-sill move nervously.

"Oh, Furness at once saw the matter in its true light. He rejected the idea altogether—at first."

The hand on the window-sill stopped its quick movement suddenly, and the bent head was bent a little lower.

"He has too much sense and good feeling not to have done so," went on Mr. Lacer, following the direction of my glance toward the window, and speaking with emphasis. "And this ought to be considered—that Furness himself would be the first to regret such a step afterward, when excited, Quixotic feelings had had time to cool."

"My father rejected the plan? Then why did you hurry here to warn us against it?"

"At first, I said—he rejected it at first. But Whiffles pressed it, and played upon his feelings so; and made out that it was the only chance—the only chance for *him*, he meant. That was merely his selfishness. Of course he'll be a loser; but he took a certain risk. He knew that Furness was not a millionaire."

"I wonder," said I, "how Mr. Whiffles came to know any thing about my mother's marriage settlement." I spoke in all simplicity, but my words had a strange effect on Mr. Lacer. His face grew dark crimson from brow to chin, and he turned away and walked across the room once or twice before he answered. When at length he did so it was with a curious air which I can scarcely describe—as if he were replying impulsively and instantly upon my words, in-

stead of having suffered a minute or so to elapse before speaking.

"Wonder! There's no cause for wonder. The fact that Dr. Hewson's daughter had a marriage settlement is well enough known. It is no secret. I—I may have mentioned it in Whiffles's presence myself, for aught I know. Any way, he is aware of it. And he means to try to make use of it for his own interest. But if you and Mrs. Furness are only firm—as you will be, I am sure, dear Anne, remembering that it is your *duty*, your plain duty toward your parents—Master Whiffles will take nothing by his move."

"There would not be property here sufficient to meet all demands? I mean, by giving up every thing—farm, house, stock, furniture, every thing?"

"It can't be done! I mean there are claimants enough in Horsingham to swallow up all that, and more. No; your father must just quietly go through the Bankruptcy Court. He has been unfortunate. Well, men *are* unfortunate sometimes. It can't be helped. The thing is done every day."

"Mother," said I, getting up from my seat, and going a step or two toward her, "if you are willing to give up this settlement, I agree to it with all my heart."

"My child!" "Anne!" exclaimed mother and Gervase Lacer simultaneously, but in very different tones.

"I agree to it with all my heart."

"Anne, you are mad! Mrs. Furness, you won't let her sacrifice herself in that way!" cried Mr. Lacer, looking from me to mother, with a countenance of the greatest agitation.

Mother had turned round from the window, and was standing opposite to me. She kept clasping and unclasping her hands with piteous irresolution. She had been calm and strong up to this point, but now her own strong inclination to the step made her suspect the righteousness of it. For her to practice self-abnegation was so habitual that it appeared to her impossible that her duty could in this case coincide with the secret yearnings of her heart. I understood it all; and I assumed an air of decision and self-will, in the hope of strengthening her in this conflict of feeling.

"I am not in the least mad, Mr. Lacer," I said, haughtily. "This plan approves itself to my reason and to my conscience. And I very soberly and sanely intend to carry it out—with my mother's permission."

"My child! my child! ought I?—is it right that you should beggar yourself?"

"Mother dear, don't let us allow words to frighten us out of our senses. Beggar myself! What does that mean? I shall not have to beg any more than I should have had to beg if you had had no marriage settlement—which might easily have happened. Besides, it is *your* money that is in question; if you are content to devote it to a just and honest purpose, who has a right to oppose you?"

Gervase Lacer stood biting his mustache, and looking at me from beneath bent brows.

"Anne," he said, in a stifled kind of voice, "you say a good deal about 'reasons' and 'justice:' don't they suggest to you that *I* have a right to be heard?"

"A right!"

"You are very cold and statue-like in your pride and self-will; but *I*—I am made of flesh and blood, and—and—I think you are using me badly."

"No, Gervase," cried my mother, putting her hand on his shoulder. "No! Don't say that. We appreciate your motives. Of course I understand that you desired to serve Anne and me in coming here to say what you have said."

He gave a short, bitter laugh, and moved his shoulder—not roughly—from beneath her hand. "Thank you," he said. "That's kind!"

"You are angry with us," said mother, gently.

"Angry! I am hurt, and vexed, and disheartened. I don't deny it." The tears positively rose in his eyes as he spoke, and he turned away and sat down, resting his head on his hand.

I was sorry for him, and I would have soothed him if I could, even at some cost of the pride he charged me with. But it was not easy to me to find words that should avail. I went up to him, and held out my hand. "Don't take it in this way," I said. "You may think me foolish and mistaken, but you ought not to be *hurt* that I reject your advice. I don't thank you the less for it."

He caught my hand and held it as he answered, with a sudden return of eagerness and animation, "Anne, dearest Anne, I implore you not to be rash. Don't be led away by a mistaken idea of generosity! Or if you must be generous," he added, tenderly, raising his handsome eyes to mine, "be a little generous to *me*!"

"I have no power to be generous. But I shall try to do what my conscience tells me to be right."

"But this sacrifice is not right—can not be right!" he cried. And then he went over all the arguments he could think of to show me what wretched consequences must result from giving up the settlement. He spoke chiefly—almost solely—to me; merely throwing in an occasional appeal to mother to confirm what he was saying. Mother looked painfully distressed. I understood the mental struggle she was undergoing.

I listened patiently until he ceased. Then I said, "But granting all you say to be true—I think it exaggerated, but let that pass—even so, I see no reason to refrain from giving up this money. No—pray don't interrupt me! Hear me first. All you show me is that I should be very poor, and perhaps have to labor for my bread. Well, there are worse evils than that!"

"Anne! you talk like a child."

"Not so; I know what poverty is, and what

hard work is. I have seen both. There is a great hope, as you have heard, of my father obtaining a good situation. I don't despair, at all events, of his finding *some* employment. I can look the future in the face. But could I do so if my father's good name for uprightness and honesty were to be destroyed? See, Mr. Lacer; perhaps to your town-bred notions all this seems overstrained. But we are country folks. My father's fathers have lived on the land for generations, and no man could say a word to blacken their good name. Furness, of Water-Eardley—it was as clear and bright as the sun at noonday."

"Why, Anne, let us speak plainly, since it must be so. Don't you know that all that is over? Don't you understand? Why, your father's name will be in every mouth in Horsingham before this evening! If you make this sacrifice in the hope of stopping people's tongues, you will make it in vain."

The tears poured down my mother's cheeks, and she hid her face in her hands.

I was shocked by this tone; it made my heart sink heavily. "I'm afraid," said I, "that we shall not be able to understand each other aright. 'Stopping people's tongues!' Do you suppose that is what I chiefly care for? We can not help their talking. I would prevent that if I could; I don't pretend not to mind it. But it is not merely what people will say. There is a real right and wrong that remains, let them say what they will. How can we keep money that is not justly ours? Would it make us happy to enjoy comforts that had been—*stolen*?"

"Pshaw! It is not stealing to hold your own."

"Nothing is ours so long as we are in debt."

"If your father gives up his own property, surely that is as much as his creditors can expect!"

"You have told me that there is not sufficient to satisfy all claims. Besides, I can not separate my interests from my parents."

"And you think nothing of *me*? You care not one straw—" Mr. Lacer sprang to his feet, wiping his heated forehead with his handkerchief, and began to walk wildly about the room, talking and gesticulating in much excitement. "It is heartless! Cruel! And for your own sake! Was ever such madness heard of? Good God! what can I say to persuade you?"

I stared at him in bewilderment.

"What does this mean?" I asked at length. "What possesses you?"

He came to me and took hold of my wrist. "Anne! Darling Anne!" he cried. "Mrs. Furness! Speak to her! Make her promise to wait, to reconsider this folly. Her father will be here soon, and then it will be too late! You know how I love her. You *know* it! Don't let this part us forever!" Then, as I stood speechless, less from disinclination than positive inability to speak, he changed his tone again, and

shook my arm, which he still grasped, so roughly and impetuously that he broke a little simple bracelet which I wore, and it fell rattling to the ground, while he reiterated, "Anne! Promise not to do this thing! Anne! Do you hear me?"

"Gervase! Mr. Lacer!" said my mother, tremblingly. He released my wrist, or rather threw it from him, and folding his arms, stood looking at me and biting his mustache.

"Well," said he at length, in a bitter, angry manner, "I have done what I can. You are resolved, I suppose, to follow your own way. As for me, I have to go away—almost immediately. Not that you will care for that!"

I did not answer him; but my mother echoed his words, "You have to go away?"

"Yes, Mrs. Furness; I have spent too much of my life here already. I asked your daughter to be my wife; but—you and she must understand that if she persists in this obstinate infatuation it will part us."

Mother looked quickly and anxiously at me. Gervase Lacer kept his eyes averted from me, and went on speaking, still in the same bitter, angry manner. It is needless to repeat his words. They were a revelation for me of the vast difference in his eyes between Anne Furness comfortably dowered and Anne Furness without a penny. I was pained, deeply pained, and ashamed for him; as in his passion and disappointment he forgot all his former protestations of disinterested devotion, and heaped accusations of heartlessness and hypocrisy upon me. I was pained and ashamed, and yet—yet at the bottom of my heart there was a feeling of relief! And the relief came from the clear certainty which rose in my mind that I had never loved him. No, no, no! I had never, never loved Gervase Lacer. If I had loved him, I think the shame and anguish of this would have broken my heart.

Mother uttered a broken word or two of remonstrance now and then, watching my face the while. But I remained quite silent under all the taunts and reproaches which Gervase showered on me in his ungoverned temper. Perhaps my very silence exasperated him.

"It is all over," he said, with his hand upon the lock of the door. "All over! I have tried—I did mean to change myself—to strive to undo the past and become worthy of you—or of what I thought you! But your 'good' people have no heart! Hypocrisy and humbug! Why should I care for the world's good opinion? There's not one living soul cares whether I go headlong to the devil or not. You might have saved me by stretching out your hand. Why did you fool me on? You knew well enough—you *all* knew—what the bait was that drew me here! But you may take this comfort to your conscience: let what will become of me now, it will lie at your door." He dashed out of the room, and in a minute or so we heard the wheels of the fly rattling at a furious pace along the road to Horsingham.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THERE had been two trustees under my mother's marriage settlement. One, old Mr. Ashby—of whom mention has been made as being the former owner of the house in which Mr. Arkwright lived, now in the possession of Matthew Kitchen—was dead, and no successor to him in the trust had been appointed. The other trustee was Mr. Cudberry. Him I resolved to see without delay. I was aware that his consent would be necessary to enable my mother and myself to give up the settlement.

Mother, when this consideration had first been presented to her, had almost despaired.

"Your uncle Cudberry will never consent, Anne!" she had exclaimed. "And I know well that he will say I am not doing my duty as a parent in allowing you to contemplate such a step for a moment."

"I do not despair, mother, of inducing him to consent. And as to what he will say—we must bear it as well as we may. It would be far easier to follow one's conscientious convictions if all one's friends looked on approvingly. But it seems to me that one of the most necessary lessons to learn in life is to bear being blamed for doing right."

"But how are you to see Uncle Cudberry? How shall I send to him?"

"I will go to Woolling myself. Look here, mother darling; I want the matter to be settled by the time father returns. It will be easier and better for us all if you can meet him with the news that the thing is resolved upon than to leave it to him to broach the subject."

Mother kissed me fondly, but her eyes were full of tears. I was anxious to put an end to the irresolution which I knew would torment her until the matter should be irrevocably settled; and I declared that I would set off at once.

"But how are you to go, Anne? The horse is in town; and, even if it were not, Flower is gone, and there is no one to drive you. What shall we do?"

"Do? I mean to walk to Woolling, mother. The day is fine. I know every inch of the road. Uncle Cudberry will send or bring me back. There is no difficulty. I shall really like the walk. It will do me good. Take care of yourself, dear mother. And if father returns before I come back, tell him that I hope to bring good news, and that I am quite cheerful and hopeful. I do believe that I see the beginning of the end of all our troubles!"

It was a long walk from our house to Woolling, and the day was sunny, and the roads dusty. But I had said only the truth in declaring to my mother that I should like the walk. The air and exercise seemed to calm the excitement of my spirits, and my brain grew clearer, and I was able to think with some calmness. At first it cost me an effort to enforce my wandering attention to the point I had to contemplate—the arguments, namely, which were most likely to avail with Mr. Cudberry, and the

probabilities for and against his consenting to my request. A thousand emotions and images distracted my thoughts, and made my pulse flutter. At length, when I reached a point in the road where a grassy lane intersected it, shaded by ancient trees, and quite deserted, I turned my footsteps aside on to its short, daisy-speckled sward, and sitting down on a hillock of moss that rose around the roots of an elm, I let my tears have way, and cried unrestrainedly.

Then, having bathed my eyes and face in a little clear runlet that went gliding half-hidden in the long grass beneath the hedge, I arose and walked on, wonderfully refreshed and calmed, and so busied with my purpose that the first stile of the series that led across the Woolling meadows appeared close to me before I had thought I could have arrived within half a mile of it.

Here I halted, and held brief debate with myself as to how I had best approach Mr. Cudberry. I had a strong repugnance to entering the house and demanding a private interview with him, under a cross-fire of questions from the assembled family. If I could but find him wandering about the farm! The corn was already cut, or I should have been sure at that hour to find him among the reapers. All at once I heard the sound of a gun, and in another minute I saw Uncle Cudberry's stooping figure crossing the stubble, two fields off, followed by his old dog Ponto. I sprang over the stile, and ran as swiftly as I could toward him, calling out, breathlessly:

"Uncle Cudberry! Uncle Cudberry! Will you stop an instant? I want to speak to you."

His hearing was not very quick, but his eyesight was as keen as ever; and as soon as he became aware of my approach he recognized me instantly, as I perceived, and stood still, gun in hand, waiting for me to come up with him.

"Why, Miss Anne," said he, in his usual slow manner, "is it you? Nothing amiss at home, is there?"

"No. That is—"

"Your mother all right? Ah, well, get your breath a bit. It isn't a pleasant running ground for a young lady, isn't a stubble-field. Come along into the house.—Down, Ponto!—The beast knows you. Come and get a—a sup of wine; or maybe you'd like a drink of butter-milk best this warm day?"

"If you don't mind, Uncle Cudberry, I should like to say what I have to say to you out here, without going into the house."

He did not seem surprised. But then I never remembered to have seen him exhibit any strong emotion of that sort.

"Ah!" said he. "Well, if that's to be it, we may as well go and set ourselves down in the shade, if we can find a bit. 'Tisn't a vast sight o' shade you'll find on Woolling Farm—no hedgerows; nothing but wire fences. My neighbor, Sir George, cusses 'em up hill and down dale every hunting season. But I don't find as that injures the crops partic'larly, so I

let him cuss away. I've rode to hounds, too, in my day; *but it was over other folks' lands*. And, mind ye, I never destroyed a fox in my life. No, no; the man don't draw breath in this county as can say a Cudberry of Woolling was ever known to be a vulpicide, as the newspaper chaps call it; and as I onderstand you got lessons in Latin from the parson at Horsingham, no doubt you know what that means, Miss Anne. But farming is farming, and fox-hunting is fox-hunting. And here we are, and we can set quiet here without having our brains fried in our skulls. You see, I pay you the compliment of s'posing you have some to be fried, Miss Anne. Tell you what, that's more than I'd say of every young lady within a hundred miles around Brookfield parish church."

Talking on thus, in his slow, deliberate, dry tones, he had led the way to a large barn that stood in an isolated position on the edge of his farm, where it was bounded by one of the leafy, winding lanes I have spoken of as running through the country that lay at the back of the Cudberrys' house.

The wide doors of the barn stood open. Within, it looked dark and cool. Mr. Cudberry drew forward a truss of straw near to the doorway, and bade me sit down on it. Then he carefully rested his gun against the wall, first assuring me that it was unloaded, took off his broad-brimmed felt hat, wiped his face and bald yellow head with a red cotton handkerchief, whistled to Ponto (who came and flung himself down with a flapping noise on the barn floor), and finally sat down on a heap of straw opposite to me, with his lean, gaitered legs stretched straight before him, his arms folded, and his eyes fixed vacantly on the sunny landscape that lay before them, framed by the wide doorway.

"Now," said he, "let's hear."

I found it not easy to begin my task; but its very difficulty spurred me to waste no words in preparatory speeches, but to plunge straight to the point.

"Uncle Cudberry," said I, "I want your consent, as my mother's trustee, to our giving up her marriage settlement for the payment of father's debts."

The leather gaiters, stretched out under my eyes, were not more absolutely devoid of any change in their tough surface than was Mr. Cudberry's countenance.

I paused and looked at him. He kept his eyes fixed in the same *unseeing* way on the landscape, and after a minute's silence observed, in the tone of one admitting the truth of some incontrovertible assertion:

"Old Ashby's dead. Yes, he's dead surely."

"He is dead, and no other trustee was ever appointed to replace him. The matter, therefore, rests with you."

I went on to put before him, with what force I could, all the arguments in favor of his consenting to the scheme. I was aware that he listened; but I can not explain how I became

aware of it, for his face remained as unchanging as if it had been carved in wood.

When I ceased speaking he turned his eyes upon me—keen, hard, bright, black beads of eyes—and said,

"Well, this is a ser'ous business."

The remark appeared to me superfluous—just one of those unmeaning, word-wasting phrases which are peculiarly irritating in moments of decisive importance. I reflected, however, in time to check any manifestation of impatience, that although the events of the last forty-eight hours had left indelible traces in *me*, and had carried me forever beyond the hazy, dreamy, debatable border-land that lies between childhood and womanhood, yet they could not have been expected to work any magical change in old Mr. Cudberry. That which he had been yesterday he was to-day, and would be to-morrow.

"Yes," said I, shortly; "it is most serious."

"A pretty kind of a market your father has brought *his* pigs to! I had heard something of this. But it's worse than I could ha' credited. 'Bout as bad as can be, I reckon—hey?"

"Not quite. There might have been no means of paying all claims. At all events, we have this money—mother's money—and we are resolved to give it up, if you will consent."

"Why—have you thought what you're asking? Your mother, you know, she's that soft and that fond of George as she'd give him her skin, or the two eyes out of her head. Ah, she would! and then say as it was *he* was to be pitied for having a blind wife. What differences there is in women!" added Mr. Cudberry, contemplatively. "But as for you, you know," he resumed, more briskly, "it's a horse of another color. You ain't bound to give up your fortune—'tis but a little bit o' money, but still all you've got to look to—nor nobody wouldn't think o' blaming you if you didn't."

"As for blame or praise, Uncle Cudberry—the blame or praise of people who know little about us, and care less—I have made up my mind not to take that into consideration at all."

"Ah, well, my lass, I don't know but what you're in the right of it. It's the principle I've acted on—not quite all my life, I won't say, but for many a long year past—and I found it answer. You do what suits *yourself*. The world 'll come round to it in the long-run. As for the talk and jabber o' fools, it's like my neighbor Sir George's cussing and swearing—it don't hurt no man's crops, that don't."

"Then, Uncle Cudberry—"

"*Only*—only you must be cock-sure as what you're doing *will* suit yourself! There's the main point. Folks make terrible mistakes in haste, and repent 'em at leisure."

I repeated all my arguments with what patience I could muster, and then Mr. Cudberry began to talk in his turn.

The hours were passing, and my father would return home, and my mother would be awaiting

me with wearing anxiety. But it was vain to hope to spur Mr. Cudberry's mind to quicken its cautiously slow pace. It was vain to hope to check his tedious iteration by the assurance that I had already perceived and considered the objections he presented to me, and that they had not availed to shake my resolution. It was vain to hope to gather from his voice, or his face, or even from his words, what impression I had made on him—what likelihood there was of his consenting to my petition. I forcibly controlled my quivering nerves, which would have prompted me to I know not what demonstrations of impatient excitement, and sat still, and held my tongue.

At length I began to discern a little light—a little dim ray, that faintly struggled through the semi-opaque medium of Uncle Cudberry's speech and manner. In coming to make my appeal to him I had not reckoned on finding him lenient to my father, sympathetic with my mother, or indulgent toward my own strong wish in the matter. But I *had* founded some hope upon a trait which I knew to be a strongly marked one in the old man's character—family pride. Oddly as it manifested itself, I well knew the feeling to exist in his breast, and to be, next to his love of power, and of money *as* power, the feeling which most nearly approached to a passion in him. He was clannish. His wife's relations, even to quite distant cousins, were included in his conception of "the family." Furness of Water-Eardley had been an honored name in our county for generations, otherwise he would never have chosen one of that stock to be his wife. Of the greatness of his own ancestors he had an idea which I believe would signally have amazed many of his grandee neighbors, could they have conceived its existence. But Uncle Cudberry's pride was of a very self-sufficing kind, and required no audience. It partook, moreover, of the eccentricity and disdain for polite appearances which had grown up during a long life passed chiefly in rustic seclusion and among dependents and inferiors.

Gradually, as I have said, he allowed a glimmer of his intentions to become apparent.

"You're of age, you know—a woman grown, not a babby. You know, or might know, what it is you're asking. I can't be held responsible like as if you was a child, or a giddy, vain, feather-headed thing like the most o' the lasses. You've got sense and resolution. Better for your poor mother if she'd ha' had a bit more o' your sort o' stuff in her. But that's the Furness blood—never without a bit o' mettle. Though maybe," added Mr. Cudberry, with a shrewd glance from his bead-black eyes into my face—"maybe it takes a wrong turn now and then, as in George's case. If my wife's nephew George had put his mettle into—growing wheat say, or mangold-wurzel (I doubt George's is but poor wheat-land, most on it), or even kept steady to prize beasts, why things would ha' gone very different. But he's Furness of Wa-

ter-Eardley, and—'twould be a crying shame in the county-side for him to smash up like a poor peddling little counter-skipping Jack of a Horsingham tradesman, as can no more tell you who his great-grandfather was than I can say what my great-grandson will be!"

"They talked of the Bankruptcy Court," said I, not without a touch of stratagem—woman's cunning it is called in books!—cunning being a weapon never used by men (in war or otherwise) when they are indubitably strong enough to do without it. But my cunning was not of a very deep or finished sort. That inner, superior "*me*," the conscience that watched my actions and motives, pitilessly spoiled the effect of the stroke by making me blurt out: "But I don't in my heart believe it would come to that, even without giving up the settlement. If we could not pay over the capital in a lump, we could and would devote the income; and creditors would not push us and press us beyond bearing. But still—"

"Ah! and who's to guarantee the expenditure of a penny of the income on paying of debts? Why, child, there might come more race-horses—more Horsingham stakes—more strokes of *luck*, good or bad. And *would* come! Best make a clean sweep, and get George off to Scotland, or wherever it be. Bankruptcy Court! Damn the Bankruptcy Court!"

I knew that I had gained my point.

Not yet, though, was I let to depart. There was to be no flush of victory—no return, in the heat of triumph, to solace poor mother's trembling heart. Uncle Cudberry had much more to say—or, rather, to say the same things many more times—before he distinctly gave the consent which I had been sure of so long ago.

At length he did give it—not, indeed, quite explicitly, but in terms which were sufficiently unmistakable to me. "Well, Anne, I shall come in to-morrow and meet the lawyer at Water-Eardley, or maybe bring him out to your father's with me. I shall have a good deal to say to him. And I mustn't get *myself* into a hobble, you understand. I must be clear in the eye of the law. That's on'y fair and just." Such was his fashion of agreeing to the request that had been made to him.

"Thank you, Uncle Cudberry, with all my heart!" I cried. "And mother will thank you too."

"You're not a common kind of lass," he answered, looking at me curiously. "You're as pleased now as if I had given you a fortin, 'stead o' helping you to make away with 'un. Some folks might call you a fool for your pains, and *will*, you may take your oath. But I don't. No; I've the name of being a close-fisted old chap. I know how folks talk of me; nobody better. But I tell ye what, I'd rather at any time of my life have married a woman as could give up her bit o' cash for the honor of her family—ah, and have took her without a farthing—than I'd have had the biggest heiress in the land, if she came of a bad stock, and had low

notions! No; *I* don't think you a fool, Anne Furness."

I was anxious to be gone homeward with my news. Mr. Cudberry did not again offer to take me into the house, but he insisted that I should have some refreshment. He would order Daniel to get ready the "sociable," and meanwhile he would himself bring me some wine and some food, if I would wait there in the barn. He would take no denial; and all I could obtain was his promise that Daniel should be ordered to make what speed he could in bringing the vehicle round for me.

It was strange to me to wait alone in the great barn, watching Mr. Cudberry striding away on such an errand, and actually—yes, actually hurrying his pace! It was stranger still to see him come back in a very brief space of time, carrying a covered basket on one arm, and a bottle of wine under the other, and to hear him press me to eat a bit of cold fowl, and to drink some of the wine he had brought, with really hospitable warmth. He had forgotten nothing. There was bread and salt, and a bright glass goblet, into which he poured some of the pale yellow wine. "This," said he, very deliberately closing and then opening one eye, without stirring any other muscle of his face—which was his manner of winking—"is neither cowslip nor raisin, my lass. This here is old sherry, as has been more than thirty years in my cellar. It's as good a glass of pale sherry as is to be had in this county. You take a sup. Water? No; hang me if you do! The missis's vintages are good enough to be drowned—this is meant to be drunk. If you want a drink o' water, take a drink o' water; but you don't have none o' my old East India sherry with it—not a sup! I hate waste, and that would be waste with a vengeance!"

I ate and drank very willingly, and should have enjoyed my meal, being healthy and hungry and tired, had it not been for my impatience to be gone. At length I heard the sound of wheels. Daniel had been ordered to await me at the last stile that gave access from the farm to the high-road. Mr. Cudberry insisted on accompanying me across the fields, and on seeing me into the vehicle.

"Good-by, Uncle Cudberry. You will come to-morrow?"

"I will come to-morrow.—Drive Miss Furness home to Water-Eardley, and take care of her, Dan'l."

As I waved my hand to him out of the sociable, he took off his felt hat, and stood bareheaded in the sunshine, looking after me until I was out of sight.

had been greatly overcome on hearing of the errand I had gone upon; had reproached himself, and declared that such a sacrifice ought not to be made; that Mr. Cudberry was bound to prevent it. But he had finally confessed that he saw no other way out of the difficulties that beset him—no other way to avoid disgrace, and, perhaps, a jail. Mr. Whiffles had stuck to him with the intention of making himself sure that father would, as he had promised (afterward taking back his word, and then again giving it, in a terrible indecision and trouble of mind), make the proposition to mother and myself. It had been at once a pang and a relief to my father to find his purpose anticipated.

All this mother hurriedly poured into my ears as I was taking my hat and cloak off in my own room; blessing me, kissing me, and crying over me—poor mother!—all in a breath; I, almost as hurriedly and incoherently, exchanging for what she had to tell me my account of what had passed at Woolling.

"I'll go and speak to your father, my darling. He is wandering up and down his own room, so miserable and restless! If he would but believe that there are better days in store! But he can't bring himself to look forward hopefully yet. We must have patience."

Mother left me, and I went down stairs to see that some tea and cold meat were set forth, as she had bidden me. I found Mr. Whiffles in the sitting-room. He was dressed precisely as on the first occasion of my seeing him, and looked perhaps a shade redder about the face and throat, and certainly a good many shades dingier about the tight orange-colored gloves.

"Your most obedient, miss," said Mr. Whiffles, voluntarily bowing, and involuntarily shaking his head at me.

"Good-evening," said I. "Will you not sit down? They are getting some refreshment. The meal will be ready immediately."

"You're very good, miss. And you are looking remarkably well. 'Pon my word, I'm delighted to see you looking so well. It's extraordinary, you know—quite extraordinary!"

It would, indeed, have been extraordinary had it been true. My image in the glass told another story. But I did not think it necessary modestly to disclaim Mr. Whiffles's compliment. It was evident enough that he was by no means at his ease. He rolled his pocket-handkerchief tightly between his orange-colored palms, and the nervous twitching of his head and settling of his chin in his collar became almost incessant.

I had an idea that he had expected some demonstration of emotion on my part—he was aware of the errand I had been upon—and that he was a little puzzled and discomfited by not finding in my face that which he had anticipated. I thought that the surest and swiftest method of relieving his mind would be to impart to him the success of my attempt, and the consequent certainty that he would receive his

CHAPTER XXXV.

My father had reached home about half an hour before I did. He had brought Mr. Whiffles with him; or, at any rate, Mr. Whiffles *had come*, and was then in the garden. Father

money. And this, accordingly, I did, in a few words.

"You don't mean it, miss!" cried Mr. Whiffles. "And you really went slap out—prompt, I mean—you really went out prompt and plucky—you'll excuse me if I drop a phrase not so choice as you're accustomed to now and then. It is far from being intended as a liberty, miss—merely 'abit, from association with far different walks in life."

I told him I was sure he would not willingly offend me, which he fervently protested was true. But still, despite the assurance that he would be paid all that my father owed him, Mr. Whiffles did not recover his composure. He still rolled his handkerchief between his hands, and jerked his head spasmodically. After a short pause he got up from his chair, and addressed me, in a very agitated manner, thus:

"Miss Furness, I'm aware that my position here at present is an unpleasant one; I dare say it's mutually unpleasant—and, in fact, it must be. But this I will say, that any thing gamier than your conduct, and that of your honored ma, I never met with in the whole course of my life! and I've naturally been a witness to a good deal of game conduct on and off the turf. It—it does you credit, miss, and honor. I assure you—I do assure you, Miss Furness, that, though sensible of my own deficiencies in the society of ladies to a greater extent than p'raps you'd credit, I—I *must* endeavor to express to you how game I think your conduct. Of course I'm aware that the unpleasantness of my position as your father's creditor must act against me in your opinion. But, upon my honor and soul, if I'd known I should feel it as I do—I—I wouldn't have acted on Captain Lacer's information! At—at least," said Mr. Whiffles, pulling himself up as one conscious of having been carried away by his feelings—"at least, I'm sure you wouldn't take any advantage of any body, Miss Furness. And if I was a wealthy party, the case would be very different altogether. But as far as my means go, if time's a hobject, or any accommodation in the way of bills might be acceptable, you've only to speak, Miss Furness; for I do assure you that gamier conduct I never met with in all my life."

Of all this speech, made with more jerks, and starts, and hesitating, and corrections of himself than I can record, one phrase stuck particularly in my memory—"Captain Lacer's information." It rang in my ears. "Information!"

"Would you have any objection, Mr. Whiffles," said I, "to tell me what was the nature of the information you speak of as having been given you by—Mr. Lacer?"

"Oh dear, Miss Furness—I—I don't know exactly," said Mr. Whiffles, looking at me with a good deal of uneasiness, and some cunning in his eyes, and rubbing his chin with the handkerchief, now reduced to a compact hard ball.

"You said—did you not?—that you acted on information received from him."

"Oh—well, you know; you mustn't suppose, Miss Furness, that Captain Lacer *put me up to the move!* Quite the reverse. The Captain, you see—naturally—why, it didn't suit his book altogether. In fact, not at all; it didn't suit the Captain's book. Though, at the same time, I'm sure he must feel proud, Miss Furness, when he reflects on the very—the extraordinary, I may say—game manner in which you have behaved; your honored ma likewise. It arose in my mind out of hints dropped by the Captain, when speaking of certain most—most congratulatory circumstances," said Mr. Whiffles, bringing the phrase out with some complacency after a rather long hesitation—"circumstances of a highly congratulatory kind, I'm sure, Miss Furness—at least, as far as the gentleman is concerned! For really more game and *noble* conduct I never was a witness to in the whole course of my life."

"Mr. Whiffles," I said, mustering a sudden resolution, "you said just now that you would be willing to oblige me."

"Any thing in my power, miss, as a man far from wealthy, and one who, however loth, is bound to think of his corn-chandler's quarterly accounts."

"I am not going to ask for money, Mr. Whiffles."

"Don't mention it, Miss Furness, I'm sure!" murmured Mr. Whiffles; but he looked relieved.

"All I ask is that you would kindly and frankly tell me the truth."

Mr. Whiffles looked somewhat less relieved than before. He said, "Yes, miss." And his head twitched from right to left, and it was rather a long time before his chin settled itself again between his shirt-collars.

"In the first place, it may relieve you from any constraint if I say that—that you need be under no apprehension of—of injuring Mr. Lacer in my parents' opinion, or in mine. Mr. Lacer parted from us this morning. Our friendship with him is irrevocably broken."

Mr. Whiffles gave a long, low whistle, clapped his leg, and nodded his head thoughtfully, but not with much surprise, apparently.

"Am I right in supposing that Mr. Lacer told you that he—that I—"

"That you was engaged to be married to him, Miss Furness?" cried Mr. Whiffles, with sudden animation, and as if a light had broken in on his mind. "Yes, he did—three months ago and more. That you was a only child, and an heiress, and a great catch, Miss Furness? Yes, he did! That, even supposing your father made ducks and drakes of the Water-Eardley property, there was a good bit o' money tied tight up by your mother's marriage settlement, which must *unrevokably* come to you, Miss Furness? Yes, he did! That, consequently, any little temporary assistance that might be advanced toward himself in the carrying on of various little transactions on the turf would be sure to be repaid with interest so soon as ever

you was his wife, and your money come into his hands, Miss Furness? Yes, he did! That Captain Lacer gave it out every wheres that he was going to marry a young lady of fortune, and got tick on the strength of it, Miss Furness? Yes, he did! And do I think you a angelic young lady, ten million times too good for him, and a good riddance that he's showed himself in his true colors before it was too late, Miss Furness? Yes, I'm damned if I don't!"

The man had worked himself into a red-hot condition of excitement, and stood panting and jerking his head, and mopping his face with the tightly compressed handkerchief, as if he had been undergoing some violent physical exertion.

"Thank you," said I, and my own voice sounded strange to me. I was sick at heart.

"Miss Furness! Dear, dear; you've turned so white! and—I hope I haven't done amiss? You—you asked me for the truth, you know."

"And I am sincerely obliged to you for it. Pray do not say any more to me just now."

He obeyed, and retired to the window, where he stood silent, neither speaking nor looking at me. Presently my parents came down. I felt a strange embarrassment in meeting my father. I had not seen him since the proposition of the giving up of the settlement had been made. I believe Mr. Whiffles's presence was not unwelcome to him as rendering any demonstration of feeling, any necessity of speaking to me on the subject of my morning's errand, unbecoming. Father came into the room with a gloomy, depressed air. He took my hand, and pressed it, and stroked my hair quickly once or twice, but with averted face; and he did not speak during the meal, which we all partook of by-and-by, except to Mr. Whiffles.

I should think that not one of us was more heartily relieved than Mr. Whiffles when the repast came to an end, and he rose to go away. He had been in an obvious embarrassment what subject of conversation to choose. His own topic—racing, and all connected with it—he felt to be inadmissible in my mother's presence under the circumstances in which we were. He even was shy of praising the charms of Water-Eardley gardens, and of a country life, being oppressed by the consciousness that they were, in fact and truth, ours no longer; and there were limits to even Mr. Whiffles's power of repeating to us, in his peculiar mournful and monotonous manner, that he really—really now, 'pon his honor and word, had never had the pleasure of seeing us looking so remarkably and charmingly well as we were looking at that moment during the whole course of his existence.

At length he went away. When he was gone mother went and stood by my father, and put her hand tenderly on his shoulder, and spoke to him in a low, caressing voice. He was terribly downcast; would scarcely speak or lift his head, and scarcely seemed to hear or notice mother's words.

All at once he clenched his fist, and struck the table heavily.

"It ought not to be, Lucy! It *shall* not be, by—!"

Mother put her hand upon his lips.

"Dearest, it *ought* to be! It is all settled. It is right, and we are more than content."

"Father," said I, not without timidity, "if you are afraid that mother and I should be carried away by feeling and—and imprudence, you can't think that of Uncle Cudberry; and he saw that it was fitting the settlement should be given up."

Father did not answer; but he listened.

"And if your desire is our happiness—as I'm sure it is—you must be sure you best consult it by letting us do our part, and take our share of the troubles that have come. And then, you know, father, it is not as if we were without a prospect or a hope. You have this situation in view. We may almost consider it yours, may we not? And you will go to it a free man, able to look the world in the face, and—and we shall all be much happier, dear father. *She* will be happier. Think of mother! How could she bear to see you weighed down by debts you had no hope of paying? And whose feelings ought to be considered before hers?"

"My poor, brave lass!" cried father, opening his arms, "you deserve a better father than ever I've been to you!" He pressed me to his breast in a tight clasp.

Mother sobbed out, as she circled us both in her arms, "Oh, George, George! how can we be so ungrateful as to repine or fret when God has given us this dear child!"

We wept together tears that were not all bitter. I had not felt my heart drawn with such tenderness toward my father for many and many a day. How trembly thankful I was to remember that embrace long afterward!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

At one o'clock the next day Mr. Cudberry came, and brought Mr. Crook, the lawyer, with him; and my mother's marriage settlement was, with due legal formalities, given up.

Mr. Cudberry had a long private colloquy with my father, to which no one else was admitted. I supposed him to be endeavoring to gain a clear understanding of the position of my father's affairs. But this, as I gathered from a few words he let drop before leaving Water-Eardley, father either could not or would not give him. Mr. Cudberry went away, with a very brief and cold "good-by" to father; a quite cordial one, for him, to mother and me.

"I'd advise you, Mrs. George," he said, dryly, "to induce George to get hold o' one or other end of this tangle of troubles he's made for himself, and try to unravel it a bit. It's like squeezing water out of a flint, trying to get George to speak plain. I'm not a man as is fond o' talking and confiding overmuch. But when a thing *has* to be said, I can make shift

to say it—and to say it so as there shall be no mistake about what I mean.”

“You must make allowance for George at this moment, Mr. Cudberry,” said mother, pleadingly. “He has gone through so much during this last week; and he feels for *us*—for Anne and me—and frets himself about what he calls this sacrifice more than is needful. He can’t be expected to have his old frank clearness of mind just yet.”

“Tell’ee what, Mrs. George. We all know about the sins o’ the fathers being visited on the children. What an amazing good look-out it ’ud be for some on us if the virtues o’ the wives could be credited to the husbands!”

And then Mr. Cudberry stolidly went his way.

Before the lawyer took his leave he said to me, in a matter-of-course tone, with a tinge of decent pity in it:

“Sad thing for those poor Arkwrights, Miss Furness. You know the Reverend Edwin Arkwright and his family very well, do you not?”

“Yes, indeed. What is amiss? What has happened?”

“Oh, I thought you might have heard. An execution in the house. Landlord distraining for rent,” answered Mr. Crook, with a piece of red tape between his teeth, and his hands busy in putting up his papers. And then he, too, went away.

Mother was almost as grieved as I was when I told her this news.

“I should like to see them,” said I. “To help them, if I could. But *that* is out of my power. Grandfather will be a friend to them, I am sure, as far as he can be. I wish—I wish I might go to Mortlands and speak to him!”

Grandfather’s name had not been mentioned between us in all our talk about the giving up of my mother’s little fortune. We both knew that he would have opposed it with all his might if he had been consulted in the matter. And we had refrained from touching on a point so painful. Each had tacitly understood the other’s feelings in the matter.

“He will be very angry at first, Anne,” said my mother, with a quickly changing color in her face. And I knew that she was not alluding to the Arkwrights.

“I think he will have some right to be angry that we did not tell him, mother dear. But your first duty, and mine, was to father. Grandfather is so wise and good that he will understand all that when his first vexation is past. Vexation for *himself*, I mean. I fear he will be—be vexed for *us* much longer. But we must have patience. I *wish* I might go to Mortlands.”

“You would have a disagreeable task, my child, in telling—”

“Perhaps not. Perhaps all Horsingham knows it by this time,” I answered, with a bitterly mortifying remembrance of the occasion when those words had last been said to myself.

“Besides, it must be faced some time. And you know, mother, we agreed the other day that we must learn to bear being blamed for doing right.”

“Blame! My own darling, none should fall on *you*, at any rate. If blame there be, it is mine—all mine!”

“No, mother, don’t let us talk in that way. But do you think I might—I could—do you think it would be right for me to go to Mortlands?”

It was now my turn to color, as I painfully felt. Donald was at Mortlands. How could I meet Donald?

We discussed the matter a little, talking with subdued voices.

“It would be absurd to suppose that Donald’s presence ought to shut you out from your grandfather’s house, Anne,” said my mother. And I felt this to be reasonable and true. And I finally resolved to go to Mortlands, despite the mingled and painful emotions which made me shrink from meeting Donald Ayrle. “And then, perhaps, I may not see him at all,” I thought; and was conscious of a most unreasonable sensation of discontent at *that* prospect also.

I resolved to go, as I said; and having so resolved, there was nothing for it but to set out as speedily as might be, so as to arrive at Mortlands in good time; for I must walk, and the autumn days were growing very short.

Yesterday had been the last day of the races. Most of the itinerant vagabonds who had been drawn by them to Horsingham were already on the march along the white highways, east, west, north, and south. Occasionally I met on my way to my grandfather’s house a cart or van drawn by wretched-looking beasts, with squalid men and women trudging alongside of it, following their wandering business under a heavy weight of poverty and hungry children. Poor, battered, disreputable nomads! There was one boy, who seemed, as far as my memory served me, to be the very counterpart of a dazzling, spangled apparition I had admired on the occasion of those long-ago races to which I had been taken as a child, and whither grandfather had sternly forbidden that Donald should accompany us.

The “counterpart” was not spangled, though. He was dressed in a shabby, thrice shabby, little over-coat, from beneath which appeared two lanky, slender legs, clad in tight and unspeakably dirty white stockings. He wore a thick ankle-boot on one foot, the other was thrust into a broken, down-trodden slipper, and had a bandage round it. He had hurt it, I suppose, in his tumbling or dancing, poor child! and limped along painfully. But his pale, pretty face and long, curling hair were like those of the dazzling, spangled apparition that had once flitted across my limited field of vision like a magic-lantern picture.

I found a little piece of money in my purse—a silver three-pence which had been hoarded

there, why I know not, from the days when it was bright and new, and had grown tarnished—and gave it him.

The boy took it in silent surprise, looked at it, and put it between his teeth—to test its genuineness, I conjecture. A bold, gaunt, copper-faced woman, with a baby at her breast, who walked beside him, turned to stare at me; as also did a black-bearded man, who carried a long balancing-pole and a bundle. I hurried on, very flushed and confused, and was painfully conscious of the unflinching and curious observation of the whole family, until a turn in the road screened me from their view. And then I discovered that my foolish eyes were full of tears.

A great disappointment awaited me at Mortlands. My grandfather was absent; had been away more than a week, but was expected home that night, it might be as late as eleven o'clock. Eliza was at Alice Kitchen's, helping to make her wedding-clothes. Mr. Donald was out in the town. He had not been himself at all these two days past, but he had been busy looking after some patients the doctor had left in his charge. Rose early and went out, and came home late, and looked fagged out. He had said he was thankful that Dr. Hewson was to be back that night; and so was Keturah, who gave me all this information. She was thankful, for she thought Mr. Donald wanted looking after himself. But he would drop down with worry and weariness before he'd neglect *poor* sick folks. However, the doctor was coming home, and then it would be all right.

Keturah stopped short in her talk, and looked at me. She had not been speaking to me in her pleasantest manner. Her pale lips had not once parted into that rare smile which was wont when I first knew her to make her stern face beautiful in my childish eyes, and which had not lost its illuminating power. But when she had looked at me her manner changed and softened immediately.

Was I tired? Was I not well? I looked far too white—and surely—why, yes; let her feel my arm. I had grown thin! I must sit down at once, and rest. And I must have some wine and a sandwich—a nice dainty sandwich that she (Keturah) would cut in her best manner. What had I been doing to myself? But young people were so foolish! Never had any notion of taking their meals regular, or any thing. That was Mr. Donald's case. He wanted looking after like a baby in some things. Was my mother well? ("Miss Lucy," Keturah was not unapt to call her in moments of emotion.) And—and my father (with a little compression of the pale lips, and contraction of the jet-black brows, now looking blacker than ever by reason of the grayness of her hair)? Then it was I myself wanted taking care of, and when the doctor came back he must see to it.

I learned from all this that nothing had transpired at Mortlands concerning the, to us, so momentous events of the last two days. My

grandfather's house, never very accessible to floating gossip, was jealously sealed against it during the race-week. Mortlands, for as long as I could remember it, presented a very stern, or rather a very blank front to the outer world throughout that holiday-time. Of late years my grandfather had naturally not grown more indulgent to the races or any thing connected with them. In fact, he had gone away from Horsingham at this time to avoid any glimpse or sound of them, as I well knew, although Keturah refrained from saying so.

"Where is Mrs. Abram?" I asked, looking round the dining-room, wherein this colloquy was taking place.

"There now!" cried Keturah, clapping her hands once loudly together, and then clasping them on her apron. "It's as queer a thing as I ever see to watch how Mrs. Abram has took to the child. You may well ask where she is. Why, I suppose you don't remember the day in all your young life—barring Sundays, Christmas-days, and Good-Fridays—that Mrs. Abram was any where at this hour except in that back-board of a chair as she chose for herself, fiddling with her wools, and knitting summer and winter. No; to be sure you can't. And now where is she, think you? Out in the garden, walking round and round, or up and down, or wherever she's bid to by the little 'un, and carrying a big soft ball she made for her herself, and ready to play with it too, poor soul! if she's ordered. Just you think of Mrs. Abram playing at ball!"

"Who? What child? What little one?" cried I, in profound bewilderment.

"Why, little Jane Arkwright. Haven't you heard of the Arkwrights? Lord! I thought you got all the news out at Water-Eardley, what with Mr. Sam Cudberry and—and *others*, as seems to confine *their* business in life to talking about the business of other folks! 'Tain't the kind of trade I should 'prentice a son of mine to myself; but I suppose it's a genteel calling."

"I have heard that there is an execution in Mr. Arkwright's house. I only heard it accidentally this morning, Keturah. Matthew Kitchen has been very hard—very cruel, I think. Poor Mr. Arkwright!"

"Matthew Kitchen! Ugh!" with a backward sweep of the hand expressive of fierce disdain. "For goodness sake don't let me begin about *that*! But we've got all the children here except the eldest, Lizzie. She's a help to her mother, poor little lass!"

"Got all the children here? At Mortlands?"

"At this identical minute they're at school—all but little Jane. It was mostly Mr. Donald's doing—his and mine between us. Mrs. Abram put herself into a quandary about it, your grandfather being away. But Mr. Donald and me thought that master wouldn't disapprove of having the little things stowed away here till their father and mother can turn round a bit, and see what's to be done. There's room

enough for the bairns, and they're very quiet and good, and most of the day they're at school."

"I feel sure that grandfather will not disapprove."

"Well, and then Mrs. Abram she come round in the wonderfulest way to little Jane. Jane's a real tyrant over her, and orders her about in her positive little fashion, as it's a curious sight to see."

It was a curious sight to see, as I afterward witnessed for myself, little Jane, with staid sagacity and an air of responsibility, taking the lead, and compelling Mrs. Abram to follow. The child was not naughty, or capricious, or troublesome. She had simply perceived that in that superior bulk, clad in sombre garments, there resided no intellectual power that was equal to the task of governing *her*. She had further perceived that the adult creature was gentle, and not indisposed to submit, whereupon Jane proceeded to exact submission with a queer mixture of baby selfishness and old-fashioned gravity. And not the least curious part of the spectacle was Mrs. Abram's behavior under this yoke. The poor woman was dimly aware that there was good chance of the child's becoming terribly spoiled under her auspices; and this prospect preying on her conscience, Mrs. Abram endeavored, every now and then, to assert some authority by suggesting a course of proceeding different from that which Miss Jane had decided upon for herself; but as, unfortunately, poor Mrs. Abram's suggestions were mostly devoid of any solid basis of reason, Jane put them aside with a sort of serene good sense, and pursued her own way with the judicious solemnity of a veteran.

I explained to Keturah that my immediate errand in Horsingham had been to endeavor to see Mrs. Arkwright, if my seeing her could in any wise serve or comfort her. Keturah did not seem to entertain the notion favorably.

"Best not see her, I think," she said. "Not *you*."

"Why not?" was my natural inquiry; and it was with difficulty that I drew from the old woman the fact that Mrs. Arkwright, in her trouble and soreness of heart, was breathing much wrath against my father, whom she accused of being indirectly—and not so very indirectly—the cause of the misfortune that had come upon her home.

"It is incredibly unjust!" cried I, hotly. "How in Heaven's name can my father be responsible for Matthew Kitchen's harsh behavior?" But even as the words were passing my lips I remembered Selina's taunting speech to my mother: "You had better make Mr. Furness pay my husband what he owes him. Then, perhaps, Mr. Kitchen will be able to afford to be patient with the parson."

That was the gist of Selina's words; and although I did not believe in the least that my father's payment or non-payment of his debts to Matthew Kitchen had at all influenced the latter's proceedings toward the Arkwrights, yet

I perceived at once what use Selina and her husband might make of the plea to Mrs. Arkwright. Doubtless they *had* made unscrupulous use of it. Keturah confirmed my thought. Yes; they had made out that Mr. Furness of Water-Eardley had a deal to do with driving Matthew to strong measures. And then Mrs. Arkwright, poor, harassed body! saw that there was no execution put into Water-Eardley. Things went on there as prosperously as ever, to all appearance. That made her wild. She was a jealous temper, and terribly fierce when her husband or children were hurt or threatened. I must not be too hard on Mrs. Arkwright. So said Keturah.

I could only return to Water-Eardley—not with a light heart, as may be guessed. Every thing had turned out disappointingly. I had not seen the Arkwrights; I had not seen my grandfather. My errand had been in vain, or worse than vain.

As I was preparing to leave Mortlands there came a sharp ring at the garden gate. I started so violently and visibly at the sound that Keturah took occasion to remark that I had always been a nervous kind of being, but that now she fairly found I'd got to a pitch of nervousness that made her quiver again only to see me; and began a second homily on the necessity of my being looked after.

"To think of jumping like that at the sound of the postman's ring! Why, child, you must be regularly overstrained, body and mind."

"Oh, the postman! Was it the postman?"

"Ay! Who else? I know his way of jerking the bell. Bark and port-wine for *you*, Miss Anne, I should say! But the doctor'll know what's right when he sees you."

There were two letters: one addressed to Donald Ayrle in my grandfather's hand ("That's to say what o'clock master is to arrive to-night, I'd lay a wager," observed Keturah, looking at it eagerly); and the other for grandfather himself.

"Look at the post-mark of this one, Miss Anne. Is it from Scotland?"

"Yes; it is from Scotland."

"Ay, and with a big grand red seal. Master said that if any letter came from Scotland while he was away, it was to be sent up to Water-Eardley, and your mother was to open it. It would be on Mr. Furness's business, master said, and he'd be eager to see it. Perhaps you'll take it with you, Miss Anne?"

I did take it, incurring much anxious and disquieted observation from Keturah by my tremulous manner of doing so.

This letter was doubtless from Colonel Fisher. It was to confirm father in the situation that had been applied for. It was a good omen—its arriving directly after the giving up of the settlement. The thought was foolish, but I could not help being superstitious. I hastened home, unconscious of fatigue, and ran into mother's sitting-room, holding the letter tightly clasped in my hand.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MOTHER was crying when I went into the room. She hastily wiped her eyes, and turned her back to the light when she saw me. But I had perceived the tears.

"Did you see your grandfather?" she asked, in a quick, confused way. "What did he say?"

I briefly told her of my grandfather's absence from Horsingham, and of his being expected back at night. She gave a little sigh, partly of disappointment, partly of relief. She had dreaded the time when my grandfather should learn the truth. Then, before I spoke of the letter, which I had slipped into my pocket, I in my turn questioned her.

"What is the matter, mother? You're not—you're not fretting for me? Not repenting what we did this morning? Dear mother, I'm sure it was a right thing to do, and I am so thankful that we accomplished it."

"No, dear. I have not been fretting about that."

"Then is there any new grief come to you?"

She hesitated for some time to answer, saying it was nothing; she had been foolish in taking it so much to heart. At length, fearing that I should think the matter worse than it really was, she told me that she had had two troubles since I had been absent. The first had been Flower's very unexpected appearance. My father was in Horsingham. Mother was alone in the house. Flower had walked in, with unabashed front, and requested to see her. He had come, he said, for his money. A quarter's wages were owing to him, which he peremptorily demanded. Mother told him that he had forfeited all right to his wages by running away from the house, in the manner he had done, without a word of warning; but that if money was really due to him—which she did not at all know—it might be that his master would pay him some portion of it, if he applied for it in a proper manner. She (mother) could do nothing for him. He must speak with Mr. Furness.

But this did not suit Flower. He tried to persuade her into giving him some money then and there. She might have been weak enough to do so, in order to get rid of him, had she had the means; but she had them not. On this the fellow grew very insolent; threatened all sorts of vague vengeance; declared that it had been a bad day for him when he came into such a beggarly house; and, in fine, was unreasonable and insolent, as was the nature of him. But through his vague threats of vengeance something definite had pierced. He knew all about Mr. Gervase Lacer. Miss Anne would not much like him to spread what he knew in Horsingham. All that he had said that time Mr. Furness blackguarded him for it had been true—and more! Why had he denied it, then, and begged pardon? Why, because Mr. Lacer had tipped him to hold his tongue. A nice, respectable son-in-law Mr. Furness had got hold

of! And Flower would take care that all Horsingham knew his story. But presently he had broken out in a still more insulting and ruffianly strain. Well, he wished Miss Anne joy, then, of the letters she had written to "Lacer," that was all! She might be sure they would be made public enough if it suited "Lacer's" book to do so, unless Mr. Furness would buy him off. And finally Flower took his departure, after treating my mother to this scene, with a volley of coarse sneers and low abuse, which he uttered aloud on his way through the kitchen and across the garden, for the benefit of the two women-servants and any others who might be at hand to hear.

"What did he mean, Anne, by letters you had written to Gervase Lacer?" asked my mother. "The man was not quite sober, but I do not believe he was so intoxicated as not to know what he was saying. You never wrote to Mr. Lacer, did you?"

"I wrote to him twice. Once at your bidding to ask him to dine or drink tea here—a mere commonplace note of three lines. The other time I wrote to him was after I had learned from him that my father was concerned in having a race-horse trained secretly. I was disturbed by the thought night and day. I kept turning it over this way and that way in my mind. At length I wrote a little letter to Mr. Lacer, asking him if there were *no* means to prevent—to prevent all the trouble that did happen, after all. It was not very wise, perhaps, so to write. But I was so restless and unhappy I could have caught at the merest straw. The letter was one which—*now*—all the world might read."

"Of course, darling! But I was doubtful of the fact of your having written at all. And how did Flower ascertain it?"

"Perhaps he posted the letter; I don't remember. Nor is it worth a second thought. Dearest mother, don't let such a wretch's low malignity disturb you. But you had a second trouble, you said. What was it?"

"The second trouble, Anne, is a more serious one. And—I'm afraid it will hurt you a good deal. Your father went to Horsingham. He was obliged to do so. There he heard that Matthew Kitchen had put an execution into the Arkwrights' house. That was a blow to him, for I think it opened his eyes to the hard, grasping character of the man. Father has always said that Matthew was more reasonable and forbearing than people gave him credit for. Then there came worse. He saw Mrs. Arkwright somewhere—in a shop or in the street—and she began to rail upon him, laying her misfortunes at *his* door. Poor father!"

"She is violent, mother. But consider—five little children! And then her husband, whom she so idolizes—"

"Oh, Anne, I can't forgive her! It was too unjust. Your father attacked publicly in that way! Charged with the ruin of her family! It was too monstrous. And the worst is that

father has so taken it to heart! He won't hear me blame the woman. 'No,' he says; 'she was right, perhaps. I bring trouble and misery on every one. My name is a by-word where it had been honored for generations!' And so he goes on. It was cruel. I can't forgive her. And are we not making sacrifices to do right? Shall not we, too, be forced to go away from our pleasant home, and give up all we have in the world?"

I felt that that was no time to plead or make excuses for Mrs. Arkwright. I thought that the letter I had brought with me would be the best means of soothing my mother, and turning her thoughts away from the thorny present to green pastures where we might hope, at least, for peace.

I took it from my pocket, and held it up before her eyes, telling her at the same time how I had come by it, and that grandfather had directed she should open it in his absence. Mother's face paled and flushed, and paled again, as she devoured the square, red-sealed envelope with her eyes.

"Oh, Anne!" she said, and clasped her hands tightly together. "Oh, Anne! if it should be—if it is—"

"Surely it is a bearer of good tidings, dear mother. The matter was nearly settled before. Ought not father to be present when we open it? Where is he? Let me call him."

"He is wandering about the shrubbery. But stay, Anne! Don't go, my child! If it should not be good news, after all! Let us spare him the chance of disappointment. Give it to me."

Her hands shook so much that she tore the cover across in trying to open the letter. And she breathed quickly, and kept her lips parted, like a person parching with thirst.

There were two letters—one from Colonel Fisher to my grandfather, the other from the new proprietor of the Scotch estate to Colonel Fisher himself.

Mother looked at the latter first. It was very brief—a few lines, as I could perceive without distinguishing the words, very neat and straight, and headed by a big gilt monogram. Mother kept her eyes fixed upon it for a much longer time than it could have taken to master its contents. She seemed to be reading it over and over again. At length, as she did not look up, I said, in a low voice,

"Well, mother?"

But the chill of her silence had struck to my heart. I knew—I knew! She glanced at me for a moment, and heaving a deep, long sigh, shook her head slightly. Then she looked down again at the letter lying open on her lap.

I took it up and read it. But to this hour I can not recollect a word of it, although I gathered the sense of it instantly. It seemed to me as if the paper were covered by one word—No! no! no!—in characters that quivered before my quivering eyes.

We remained a long time without speaking. Then we tried to cheer each other. This one

chance had failed, but there would be others. We had had no right to make sure of success on the first attempt. So little trouble had been taken, after all. And so forth.

"You have not looked at the other letter, mother," said I. "What does Colonel Fisher say? He may have heard of something else."

"Colonel Fisher!"

The words were echoed in my father's voice, and my father stood in the room.

There was no help for it. He must read the ill news without any preparation.

He soon dispatched the straight, neat lines, with their ostentatious gilt monogram; read them almost at a glance, and tossed the note down on the table. Then he took up Colonel Fisher's letter to grandfather, and began to read it.

"My dear Doctor Hewson—' Why, this is addressed to your father, Lucy."

"Yes; he is away, and left word that any letter from Scotland was to be sent here. I was to open it."

Father then read the Colonel's letter, but not aloud. We watched his face. It did not move, or change much, except that a dull red color spread itself over his forehead and cheeks. I have said that my father was a tall man, stalwart and upright. During these last few weeks he had become bowed, and his head hung forward on his breast with a moody air. It was as if failure and shame and disappointment and remorse had been ponderable things, whose burden was laid upon his shoulders.

He did not speak a word, but folded the letter again, laying it on the table before him, and smoothing it with the palm of his hand with a slow, monotonous motion.

Mother, uneasy at his silence, began to talk in as unconcerned a manner as she could assume. It was a disappointment, of course; but who could get a suitable situation at the very first attempt? Father might find something in England. Perhaps he would like that better than going off to the Highlands. It might turn out well after all, might it not? Mr. Cudberry had spoken only the other day of a large estate in one of the eastern counties that he had heard of; the property of a minor; and the guardians wanted a responsible person as steward and general manager. And thus poor mother went on, gathering together what crumbs of comfort she could find, for her husband's disappointment.

Disappointment! Was it disappointment? There was an inscrutable look in his face that attracted my attentive eyes to it incessantly, and as incessantly baffled their scrutiny—a look that made his face strangely *unfamiliar* to me, if I may use such a phrase. We speak of a face being *lighted up*, and we all know what is meant by it. We know what it is to see the eyes, those "windows of the soul," shine with an inward fire. In my father's countenance I could fancy that the reverse had taken place. Light after light had been quenched. The sun

of the spirit had grown dim. The face was not altered as by age or imbecility. No, the lines were firm, the brows and jaw strong as ever. But behind that mask there was not light, but darkness. But I feel how inadequate are my words to convey the impression it made upon me.

While mother was speaking he continued to smooth the folded letter with the palm of his hand, neither looking up nor making any other movement. When she paused he said in a queer, apathetic manner, and in a monotonous tone, very unlike his old, robust voice, which had a wide range of notes in it,

"I suppose that your father would take care of you and Anne, if I were gone, Lucy?"

"Gone, George darling! Gone where?"

Father shook his head.

"That I can't tell," said he, in the same manner as before.

"If you were obliged to be away for a time, of course we could be at Mortlands, Anne and I. But I had hoped we should all remain together."

"Your father is displeased with me; very justly. But I—don't—think—he would—visit it—on you—and the girl."

The words dropped out slowly, slowly, from his mouth, as rain still drips from the eaves when the force of a shower has long spent itself.

"Father would do any thing in the world for us, or for you, dear George! Indeed, indeed he would."

"For me? He can do nothing for me. But he is a good man. I have always known that."

"You must not say he can do nothing because this first trial has failed. You are cast down by it. But let us look the state of the case fairly in the face. All debts will be paid. That is the first and chief comfort, is it not? You will leave Water-Eardley owing no man a shilling. Nay, perhaps there may remain a little money in hand from the sale. If you have to wait a few weeks before finding employment, we have a home to go to, and a welcome. Mortlands would shelter us all, George dear. With your knowledge and experience and recommendations, it is difficult to suppose that you would be long without a situation. And you would not be foolishly proud. You would take any honest employment to start with. Why, when I see how clear and straight our way lies, I wonder that we can be despondent. It seems almost ungrateful, darling!"

As mother spoke she had put her hand on father's shoulder caressingly, and now stooped down and kissed his forehead. He did not respond to the caress, but looked up at her with haggard eyes, and said:

"It is easy to talk of things being clear and straight, and of all debts being honorably paid. Debts! Who knows whether there is enough to cover them? Who knows whether you and Anne have not beggared yourselves for nothing? Shall you not curse me in your hearts if it turns out to be so?"

"George!" cried my mother, and turned away from him, weeping. Nothing so cut her to the heart as any word from him which seemed to show that he fancied he had lost her love.

It was a weary, dreary day, all that remained of it. But in the evening there was a full moon, and we coaxed my father to go with us into the garden. It was not warm, but a serene, still night, and we wrapped shawls round us and paced about the garden paths, among the flowers and shrubs, looking so spirit-pale in the moonlight. Then we sat down on a garden bench, and lingered there until quite late. It was long since we three had been together undisturbed. Mother sat encircled in my father's arm. Her head leaned upon his shoulder. One of her hands clasped his hand; the other held one of mine. Her face was upturned to the serene sky, and it looked, I thought, like one of the white, sweet flowers at her feet.

Father grew less moody and despondent under the sweet, calm influences of the time and place. He spoke more unreservedly than he had previously done about Colonel Fisher's letter. We (mother and I) had not read it. But he told us that it threw blame on him for not having written promptly to the gentleman whom he wished to employ him. That this latter was a touchy, self-important personage, who had considered himself affronted by his offer being treated with apparent indifference. That, consequently, he (the owner of the estate) had caused inquiries to be made, in the *hope*, Colonel Fisher said, of receiving answers unfavorable to my father's character and fitness for the place. And questions so asked are generally answered in the sense of the questioner. The result had been the neat, straightly written, gilt-monogrammed note, briefly regretting to be obliged to decline Mr. Furness's services.

I remembered mother's urgent entreaties to my father to write to Scotland and make strenuous application for the place *before* the fatal September races; and I was penetrated by the angelic sweetness which led her to comfort and cheer my father without one word of blame, or even of *regret*, for his self-willed infatuation. He felt it too, and spoke to her very softly and tenderly, and listened to her prophecies of future happy days in store for us, until the dull apathy and gloom which had enveloped him all day seemed to *break* here and there, as a cloud breaks, and to give us glimpses of his real, frank self.

"Well, Lucy—my *good* Lucy! My perfect wife! I will try to hope against hope," he said, slowly. "But I have a clog that you—thank God!—have not. And it weighs me down sorely, heavily—a troubled conscience, Lucy. But it may be that all is not quite lost and ruined. If only—"

My father never finished that sentence. But he repeated the words several times broodingly, and, as it were, to himself.

"If only—"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE next morning, early, not much after seven o'clock, the Brookfield carrier, on his way from Horsingham, brought mother a note from my grandfather. It must have been written overnight, immediately after his arrival at Mortlands. The original of it lies before me, creased and faded by the years it has passed in mother's little Tunbridge-ware box, into which she put it that morning after she and I had read it. This is the note:

"MY DEAREST LUCY,—I am much put out by finding on my return home, not Donald Ayrle, but a longish letter from him, to say that he has left Horsingham altogether. I left him in charge of some poor patients. He fulfilled his trust loyally until the last moment. Then, being assured that I was coming back, he fairly ran away. He tells me that he found living on at Mortlands, where every room in the house, every shrub in the garden, is indissolubly associated with Anne, was more than he could bear. The constant expectation—half hope, half fear—of being brought face to face with her, 'kept him on the rack.' That I take to be the truth, but not all the truth. Disappointed love is hard to bear; but I think he might have borne it. But there was jealousy! Donald is capable of being unspeakably jealous, and he was met at every turn in Horsingham by reports of Anne's engagement to that man Lacer. Keturah tells me it is spoken of by every one. But think of the foolish lad going off in that way! Well, old folks should not hope to win affection from their juniors. I had fancied he was fond of me. And I—to tell you the truth, Lucy—there is not much I would not do to get him back again. But I don't know how to set about it. About Lacer—is it true? Lucy, Lucy, be careful! As to Anne—Let a man think of the unlikeliest choice for a woman to make that his imagination can compass, nine times out of ten she'll beat him by making one unlikelier. And yet I thought I knew Anne better. Oh, children, children, for God's sake don't be rash! I feel very lonely, and more heavy-hearted than I remember since your mother died. I loved that boy like a son. I *love* him like a son. He is a fine fellow, though he has deserted me in this way. How I wish—Child, I am selfish, like the rest of the world, and harp upon my own special theme too much. Anne took a Scotch letter away, Keturah tells me. May it contain good news! Urge George not on any account to delay writing himself. There has been too much delay already. Moreover, Keturah says that Anne is not looking well—pale, thin, languid. I must see her. But to-morrow, and the next day, and the day after that my hands will be full, and no Donald to help me. By the end of the week I will come to Water-Eardley. I suppose George won't refuse to shake hands with me. I write

this partly to let you know that I am not unmindful of you all, and partly—because I am selfish, like the rest of the world—to ease my own heart a little. Always your loving father,

"ABEL HEWSON.

"Send to me, or say to me, or write to me the truth about Anne and that—Lacer. If she is not engaged to him the news will be the best cordial you could give me. It is bad for a woman not to marry the right man; but to marry the wrong one—If, on the other hand, it must be, and there is no help for it, put this in the fire, and say nothing about it to the child. A woman never forgives sinister auguries about her future husband—especially if they come true. And Anne may want me some day. I would have no barrier between us that might make it difficult to her proud spirit to come to me for such counsel and help as I can give her.
A. H."

That was the letter; one very characteristic of my grandfather in every way. We who knew him understood the weight and value of each word in it very accurately. And we were sure that Donald's departure had been a heavy blow to him. Whither Donald had gone was not stated. Perhaps my grandfather did not know it himself. But in all likelihood he would have gone to London, we said. There had been a talk of his doing so, in order to complete the studies necessary for his profession, months ago. But that would have been very different from his present abrupt departure. That would have been a temporary absence, duly prepared for and foreseen, and with the prospect of ultimately returning to Horsingham at no distant date.

"I think it was very wrong of Donald to leave grandfather in that way," said I. But as I said the words with cold severity I had hard work to keep down my tears, and there was that painful "lump" in my throat, which I suppose most people have experienced.

"We can, at all events, give dear grandfather the *cordial* he speaks of," answered my mother, not looking at me, but at her coffee-cup—we were at breakfast. "It will comfort him to know that—that report is untrue."

"I wish from the bottom of my heart that we were away from the place and the people in it!" I exclaimed, bitterly. I had chosen to blame Donald for going away, but I myself felt a longing to fly from all the surroundings and associations which had become odious to me.

Mother's little half-suppressed sigh involuntarily reproached me for the selfishness of my speech, "I wish that we were away!" Were we not going away from the place that had been her happy home for many bright years—from the place that held little Harold's grave? Poor, patient, uncomplaining mother!

"I *will* try to be a comfort to you, darling mother!" I said, kissing her penitently. She looked a little surprised at this exclamation, following almost immediately the expression of my wish that we were away from Horsingham.

She had not followed the sequence of my ideas.

Father had not yet left his bed. I have mentioned how he had gradually come to be a confirmed sluggard, and what a trouble this had been to my mother, until heavier griefs had made that seem insignificant by contrast. But now we said to each other that it would be necessary for father to return to his old active habits, if any good were to be done either in the way of seeking employment or in keeping it when obtained.

"I did not like to rouse him this morning," said mother, "for it was broad daylight before he fell asleep. He was so restless and miserable."

"I thought," said I, "that my father had gone to bed in a calmer frame of mind than I had seen him in for some time."

"Yes; at first it seemed so. But I think it was only seeming. He put on a more hopeful manner to please me. But that letter from Scotland hurt him more than you can fancy. What was the use of trying to get trusted? he said. No one would trust a man who had been false to his own family, and had ruined himself and them. And to be watched and suspected, and to have his fault thrown in his teeth by strangers, was more than he could bear."

"I don't think father is well. All that is morbid and unlike himself. I think we ought to get grandfather to see him."

"No; he is not well. But when I told him I thought so he shook his head, and said that Dr. Hewson could do him no good. There was only one medicine that could cure him."

"What did he mean by that?"

"He meant that he should not be better until his mind was more at peace. And who can wonder at that? I had fallen asleep, and woke up in the middle of the night, to find your father wandering about the room. The moon was setting, and I could just dimly see him near the oaken press that stands in the recess in our bedroom. I called to him, and he bade me go to sleep again. He had been too restless to lie in bed, so had been walking about to try and tire himself out. This morning, when it was quite daylight, he began to sleep, as I told you, and I had not the heart to disturb him when I got up."

Mother and I sat quietly in her little sitting-room. I was sewing, and she was making out a list—a very short list—of things that she should wish to keep when Water-Eardley and its contents were sold. We had as yet learned no particulars as to the disposal of the settlement money that had been given up. We had heard enough, however, to be sure that Mr. Whiffles's claim would not swallow it all. There were, doubtless, other debts—so called, *of honor*—which mother could not reckon up. Debts in the town there were. But these, we thought, could not possibly amount to more than the sale of the lease and stock and furniture would amply cover.

"Father owes Matthew Kitchen money," said I, hesitatingly.

"Yes; but that can not be much. We have not been buying carriages, at least!" said mother, with a faint smile.

"Matthew's grandfather—old Mr. Green—was, I have heard, a money-lender. You remember that Mr. Cudberry told you so once, mother. Perhaps father was in Mr. Green's debt when the old man died. And if so—as Matthew was the sole heir—"

Mother looked up at me uneasily.

"Do you *know* any thing, Anne?" she asked.

I told her, for the first time, of the conversation I had been a witness to between my father and Matthew Kitchen. She mused a little, and then said: "Matthew is a hard, grasping man. I don't expect much mercy from him. But he can not claim more than his due, and his due can not—*can not*, surely!—be so large but that we shall manage to clear all scores with him. There's the portrait of George's mother; *that* he would like to keep, I know. And I wonder if I might have the work-box he gave me before we were married! Though it is fitted with silver, it is old-fashioned now, and I should not think it could fetch much." And mother went on with her list.

"Oh, ma'am, will you step into the kitchen? Now directly, please! There's two men wants master, and I told 'em he was abed, and they said they couldn't help that!"

Sarah, the house-maid, uttered all this with breathless rapidity, and her pale face added to the impression her agitated speech made upon us.

Mother rose up from her chair like a figure moved by a spring.

"Who are the men? What do they want?" she said, in a trembling voice.

"Oh, ma'am, I don't know; but—I think—leastways, I'm a'most certain, as one on 'em is a sheriff's officer. I know him by sight. Joe Scott his name is. And—and—please, ma'am," added Sarah, beginning to cry, partly from sympathy, partly from excitement, "they say they're *in possession*."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

I MUST state as briefly and clearly as I can the facts which we only learned piecemeal, and with dismay and confusion of mind indescribable. Indeed, it was long before we became acquainted with much that I shall here set down.

My father had given a bill of sale over all his property at Water-Eardley to Matthew Kitchen.

The latter had worked and schemed to this end for a long time past. Most likely had had some such plan in his mind from the time when he first discovered that my father was, to a certain extent, in old Green's power. The sums that father had borrowed—first of the old man, and afterward of his grandson, Matthew—did

not, when all usurious advantage was taken, amount to more than half the real value of the property at Water-Eardley. Nevertheless, when Matthew Kitchen had not only declined to make further advances, but had pressed for the payment of the existing debts on the ground that he held no sufficient security for his money, and could not afford to run the risk of losing it, father had desperately given the bill of sale; and, still more desperately, had trusted to Matthew's promise that he would not put it into execution unless no other hope remained of indemnifying himself.

The news of father's disastrous racing speculation had spread through Horsingham. It was known that my mother's marriage-settlement had been given up for the payment of her husband's gambling debts. Moreover, the rumor had spread throughout the town that Furness of Water-Eardley was about to sell his furniture and property for the benefit of his creditors. The trades-people to whom my father owed money were well satisfied enough with this prospect. Not so Mr. Matthew Kitchen. There would doubtless be enough to pay all claims if the property were sold—as must be reckoned on—even much under its value. But his bare due did not satisfy Matthew. He held the bill of sale, and resolved to enforce his power while there was yet time.

The men who had come on the dismal errand of informing my father that no stick or straw in Water-Eardley manor-house, or on Water-Eardley farm, belonged to him any longer, were civil enough. I fancy such men mostly are so. For gratuitous incivility some sort of emotion is necessary—malice, anger, resentment, sullenness, some feeling or other. These men in the present case had none. The whole matter was to them one of absolute indifference. The man whom Sarah had called Joe Scott spoke to my mother with uncovered head and bated breath. It was a show of respect due to misfortune. His business lay with misfortune, as a funeral undertaker's business lies with death and mourning. How could he be specially sorry for us? But he understood that a grave and regretful demeanor was decent under the circumstances, and he did his best to assume one.

Mother looked about her confusedly, like a person who has been suddenly and roughly roused from sleep.

"I do not understand it," she said. "Could I not speak with Mr. Kitchen? It is impossible that my husband can owe him the worth of all the property here! *Every thing?* Oh, it must be a mistake! It is impossible!"

"No mistake, ma'am. Mr. Kitchen holds a bill of sale, you know. You can say whatever you have a mind to, to him, ma'am. We've nothing to do with that. Only we must carry out our instructions, you know. Ladies mostly don't understand these things. You'd better let Mr. Furness know as soon as possible, ma'am."

"Yes, dear mother," whispered I in her ear, "father ought to be roused without delay."

"Quite so, miss. In fact, he—he *must* be told, sooner or later, you know," said Joe Scott.

I looked round the kitchen. The two women servants stood helplessly whimpering and biting their fingers. At the open door appeared two or three heads, eagerly looking in. They darted out of sight on my directing my gaze toward them. I had recognized them as belonging to some of the farm laborers.

"Is there any one here," said I, "who will go to Dr. Hewson's house, Mortlands, and carry a note for me as quickly as possible?"

Two voices answered, "Me, miss!" and the peeping heads reappeared. The messenger I chose was a cow-boy, a lad of fourteen, swift of foot, as I knew, and acquainted with my grandfather's house. I scrawled a couple of lines, imploring grandfather to come to us at once, and watched the lad set off with my note at the full speed of his long, uncouth legs. Mother had followed me into the sitting-room, whither I had run to write, and stood there now, with her hands pressed to her forehead. Writing the note and sending it off had taken little more than a couple of minutes.

"Darling mother," said I, "father *must* be awakened! Shall I do it? Shall I go to him for you?"

She took her hands from her head quickly, and then passed them once or twice over her brows, pressing down her closed eyelids.

"No, Anne," she said, speaking hurriedly, like one who can not brook an instant's delay, and yet not moving from the spot where she stood. "No, no, my child! I must do it. I must tell him. He will bear it better from me."

I waited an instant or two, expecting to see her go. Finding she still did not move, I again offered to go in her stead.

She made two or three quick steps toward the door, and then suddenly stopped, and burst out into silent, bitter weeping.

"Dearest, darling mother! let me go! I am stronger than you. I will tell father."

"No, no!" she said, trying to restrain her tears, that streamed down her cheeks. "It is not that. I will tell him. But—oh, Anne, this will break his heart!"

Then she went quickly out of the room, and I heard her step ascending the staircase.

I stood at the window and looked out on the garden beds that my eyes had rested on so many thousand times. It was a beautiful autumn day. The distant woods had a thin veil of silver vapor softening their variegated tints. But overhead the sky was clear, and the sun shone brightly. All was peace and silence. Only the low of cattle came up from the river-side meadows now and then, with a tone by distance made not unmusical.

But to me all was loathsome—the silence as the sound, the sunshine as the shade, the very perfume of the flowers.

To a sick palate no savor is delicious; and my soul was sick. All my senses seemed turned

into instruments of pain, instead of pleasure. I could not cry; I could do nothing but stand as if I had lost all power to move, miserably waiting for mother to return, and feeling *sore* in every nerve.

Presently she did return, after an absence which really had been brief, although in passing the minutes had seemed to me almost unbearably lengthened out.

"What does he say? How did he—how did he bear it, dear?"

"He said only a word or two; kissed me, and bade me go down to the men and tell them he would be ready directly."

"Then he was calmer than you had feared?"

"He was calm; but oh! there was an awful look in his face. A look almost like—like one insane," added mother, after a long pause, and in a horrified whisper. And a strong shudder shook her from head to foot. I clasped her tightly in my arms. I could not speak. She had suddenly touched on a secret fear which I had tried to hide even from myself. Without another word she left me, and went to the kitchen to give the men my father's message; and I remained still standing at the window as before.

"What's that?"

I found myself uttering the words aloud, in a half whisper, while my heart throbbed with a rapidity that was agonizing. I had been startled by a sound that seemed to make every fibre in my body quiver—the report of a pistol.

Something rushed along the passage, and passed the open door. I saw a fluttering garment, and the vision of a white, set face, with wide, staring eyes. It was my mother's face. She flew up the stairs with a swiftness that was awful—superhuman. Others followed her quickly; but she outstripped them as a winged creature might. There was a second's pause, and then—oh, my God! the agony of that sound! Shriek upon shriek pierced the ear, like stab upon stab of a sharp, cruel sword. I mounted the stairs in a sort of frenzy, unconscious of my footsteps, as if a great wind had taken me and whirled me upward.

There was a crowd of people in the room already—the servants, some of the farm laborers, and the two who had come on Matthew Kitchen's errand. I could not see my mother, but those dreadful shrieks continued. Two or three women had gathered about her; the others surrounded the bed. When they became aware that I was among them some of the men cried out to me to go away, that was no place for me. The man named Scott even took me by the arm to lead me from the room, but I struggled and resisted.

"Mother! mother! Let me go to mother!" I remember crying out those words over and over again. I was trembling so convulsively that my teeth chattered in my head; but I still struggled to reach my mother. In the movement thus caused among them the herd of people round the bed parted, and I saw—

No; even now I can not write it; I can not think of it. My hand is cold; my fingers quiver. All the anguish comes back again; all the old scars throb and ache. I see my mother's form flung, with wild hair, across the bed—the women struggling to raise her, to drag her back—her clenched hands clutching at the coverlet. I see an awful stain slowly spreading, creeping, winding horribly along the floor. I see a ghastly heap upon the bed; then all is red before my eyes; my ears are full of a roaring sound like the surging of the sea; the ground rocks and heaves and sinks from under me, and I plunge down, down into a black gulf of unconsciousness!

CHAPTER XL.

ANOTHER "painting on the wall" of one of those secret chambers in the brain which preserve their memories with such diverse and capricious degrees of vividness—another picture out of my past life grows distinct to the mind's eye as I sit musing at my desk. Memory, as one who carries a flickering torch, flits from spot to spot, and holds her light now here, now there, illuminating the long-unseen pictures with scant, wandering rays. But at length she pauses, and stands still before one special scene; and the flame of the torch grows steady, and the picture clear.

A cold, white world. A dove-colored sky, fretted with the black tracery of some delicate branches whence the snow has melted, although on the ground it is still lying in a smooth sheet that wraps the earth softly, and rounds every outline that it covers, giving even the angular garden seat a new aspect. On the surface of the snow many tracks made by tiny claws, and one bold robin nimbly pecking at some bread crumbs that look a dark stone-color by contrast with the dazzling white they lie on, and affronting with his confident red breast and black diamond eyes the perilous observation of two watchful bipeds at a window—a tall window that opens to the ground, and whose bright panes reflect to the watchful eyes which the robin braves so jauntily ruby gleams and flashes of fire-light. In the air, that *snow-silence* which precedes a fall; for the dove-colored sky is brooding softly, and there are furled-up folds of cloud with pale-lined edges, whence the feathery flakes will float earthward by-and-by.

Within the room whose window opens to the ground are three persons. Two—a young woman and a little child—are watching the robin. On a sofa drawn near to the blazing fire lies a figure covered with a crimson shawl. One arm is thrown outside the shawl, and is clad in black. A pale face, with gray, softly waving hair, is relieved against a cushion covered with damask, that once was red, but has now faded into a sombre brownish tint. It has been mel-
lowed by time, as the colors of every thing in the room seem to have been—of the Turkey

carpet, of the curtains, the morocco-covered chairs, and the shining, almost black, surface of the mahogany table. The face on the pillow is very wan and thin. The eyelids are closed, and surrounded by dark hollows; the slightly parted lips drawn down at the corners, and the forehead is marked by strong wrinkles. The lines on the forehead are mostly horizontal, and are strongest above the eyebrows, giving a peculiar expression of painful weariness to the whole countenance. A dog lies stretched on the hearth-rug. His shaggy hair covers his eyes; but he blinks from beneath it with a half-sleepy, half-watchful glance directed toward the figure on the sofa. Within the room, absolute silence. Without there is silence also, as I have said, save for the faint sound of bells chiming from a distant belfry—musical, melancholy bells, whose tones are dear and familiar to me, and float through all my memories of the place wherein I now am listening to them. For I am at Mortlands, and the bells are pealing to church, and it is Christmas morning.

Presently Mrs. Abram steals into the room, dressed in a new black bombazine gown, the dye of which sends forth an odor more powerful than pleasant. She has on a black straw bonnet, and a black merino shawl, embroidered at the corners with stiff groups of flowers worked in black silk. The two flat loops of hair lie on her forehead as of old. She is altogether very little altered within my knowledge of her. To-day she is attired in her best, and her hands are covered with black woolen gloves; the touch of which has the property of setting my teeth strongly on edge, as I remember was the case even from my childish days, when my sensitive little finger-nails used to be ruthlessly brought in contact with the interior of woolen mufflers.

Moreover, to shield her hands from the December cold, Mrs. Abram wears a muff of her own manufacture; a knitted muff of white worsted, with dots of black worsted scattered over its surface. "Imitation ermine," Mrs. Abram calls this fabric.

"Is Jane ready?" asks Mrs. Abram, in a low voice, approaching the child at the window; whereupon Jane turns round with her finger on her lip, and a frown of warning severity on her brow, and hisses out, "Hus-s-s!" and points to the figure on the sofa, and shakes her absurd little head with solemnity.

"Oh, I won't wake her, love," answers Mrs. Abram; lowering her voice, however, still more than at first. "Is Jane ready to come to church with me?"

Jane is ready. She is enveloped in warm knitted garments, wherein it is not difficult to recognize Mrs. Abram's style and touch. There is more of the "imitation ermine" about the little red jacket she wears. Her tiny legs are encased in white ribbed stockings of the softest lamb's-wool. She has a muff like Mrs. Abram's tied round her middle by a cord and tassel—(how I remember my own inaccessible pocket-

handkerchief as I behold this arrangement!)—and wears a little bonnet with a net frill inside it, framing her face; and the net frill is adorned with many bows of narrow blue satin ribbon. Well and warmly clad is little Jane from top to toe. And there are no patches on the small leather shoes she is noiselessly tapping one against the other.

"Are you not going, Anne love?" asks Mrs. Abram, so inarticulately that I rather guess at her words than hear them, for she keeps her mouth half open while she speaks them.

"No; I will stay with mother. Grandfather was sent for, just now, to poor old Betsy Lee. They say she is dying, poor old soul. I don't know when he will be able to get back. So I will stay with mother."

"Don't whisper; I am not asleep," says a faint voice from the sofa. Mother opens her eyes and looks at us all for a moment, then closes them again and gives a long quivering sigh.

"Does your head ache, dear mother?" I ask, bending over her.

"Not ache—no. But there is such a weight on it. You see I can't bear—"

She points, with a little feeble motion, to a widow's cap that lies on the pillow beside her head. She has tried to wear it constantly. But there are many times when the crape is too heavy a burden for her weary brain, and she is forced to leave her hair—still softly waving, but now quite, quite gray—uncovered. But she will always have the cap at hand. She will never entirely relinquish it. Grandfather has once tried to persuade her to give it up; but he never repeated the attempt. He said to me, after having made it, "How every year that passes over my head teaches me toleration! I am ashamed to think, little Nancy, how often I have been too hard on the poor women that cling to that superstitious bit of crape head-gear. I judged them with my head, and not with my heart."

Mrs. Abram and little Jane go away together to church. As they are disappearing through the doorway, mother says, without opening her eyes, "Pray for me!" and turns her head on the pillow away from the light.

Roger Bacon has sat up on his haunches to watch little Jane's departure; has perceived—by what means I know not, but I am sure of the fact—that on this morning it behooves him to make no attempt to accompany her, and, when the door is fairly closed behind her, lies down again luxuriously in the shine of the fire.

Silence again. Perfect silence, for now even the distant bells have ceased. I sit down on a low stool by the hearth—my favorite seat, and one I always occupy when grandfather is not present. He does not love to see me in that place. It reminds him too vividly of a certain autumn evening long ago, when he saw two young heads, one dark, the other golden-fair, side by side in the light of the red flame upon

that very hearth. Grandfather has never told me this; but I—I know it.

As I sit there alone to all intents—for mother, if she be not sleeping, feigns to sleep, in order that I may not talk to her—I look back musingly on the past three months. My musings follow no constant course, but they all tend backward, although ever and anon leaping from one point to another, and leaving a gap between; or, on the other hand, lingering wistfully around some sunnier spot, unwearily going over its minutest details.

Let me gather up somewhat the strands that made the thread of my narrative, since that awful day which I can not yet bear to write of—and it lies long years behind me; but from which, on that Christmas morning, all my thoughts started and fled away, like a flock of terrified birds. No! Let my retrospective musings be what they might, there was a point—the grim entrance to that black valley of the shadow of death—at which the spirit stopped shuddering, as one shudders who, with averted head, passes some scene of remembered horror, shutting eyes and ears lest the recollection, which is not dead but sleepeth at the bottom of his heart, should wake and stir, and cry aloud, and pierce him with new agony.

We were brought to Mortlands. After our arrival there, my mother lay three weeks in an illness which threatened her life. Great part of the time was passed in alternations of delirium, with terrible periods of consciousness and memory, during which she cried almost incessantly. At last the fever left her; left her as colorless and nearly as lifeless as the ashes of a burned-out fire. Grandfather heaved a long breath one day at her bedside, and, turning to me, whispered, “She will live!” I had scarcely realized until then how near we had been to losing her.

Then, when the peril had ceased, I began to look around and contemplate our position. During the worst time of mother’s illness neither grandfather nor I had, as it were, lifted our eyes from her. I do not believe that any inmate of the house had thought much about any thing outside the four walls of her sick-room. Only when she began to get better had we leisure to remember that there was a busy moving world without, and that we, too, consciously or unconsciously, were being carried onward “in earth’s diurnal course.”

We were quite penniless. There was nothing in the world that we could call our own. Grandfather, as soon as we could speak together on the subject, made me understand that his home must thenceforward be our home. He had nearly relinquished all lucrative practice of his profession, attending chiefly poor patients, from whom he would take no fee. But now, he said, he meant to resume his practice. “That is,” he said, “if it will resume me. When a man falls out of his place in the ranks, the gap he leaves is quickly closed up. There is enough—not much, but enough—for us all to

live on as it is. Whatever I earn will be put by for you after I am gone, because when Lucy”—he broke off and put his hand over his eyes for a moment, then resumed—“because some three or four and twenty years ago I sank the greater part of what I possessed in an annuity. There is a little pittance secured to poor Judith, and there is this house and garden.”

He went on planning what he would do, and what immediate steps he would take to obtain active employment in his profession. He was now close upon seventy years old; but I thought, as I looked at him, that I had rarely seen a face and figure more instinct with vivacity and energy than his. His eyes shone with a radiance that seemed to warm one’s heart. I thought him very noble and admirable in his courage and hopefulness and contempt of his own ease, the dear, unselfish, fine-natured old man!

Mother was not spoken to about his plans. It was long before she could bear the sound of any voice but his or mine; and if we uttered a word of tenderness, or said any thing beyond the merest bald commonplaces which were necessary in daily intercourse, she would go off into convulsive hysterical fits of weeping which entirely prostrated her strength. When she began slowly, slowly, to get better, it befell that poor Mrs. Abram grew to be a sort of comfort to her. Mrs. Abram was quiet and melancholy and *dull*—very willing to be talked to, not unwilling to talk, and equally willing to sit by mother’s bedside or sofa knitting away in silence. She had been warned so strenuously and severely as to frighten her into implicit obedience, not to broach any of her peculiarly lugubrious religious views to my mother. When speech on this subject was forbidden her, very few topics remained for the exercise of her loquacity, which, in truth, was never excessive. One topic, however, she had—my grandfather’s goodness. His perfections, his learning, and his talents were an unfailing theme with poor Judith. And to her sincere, if unskillful, praises mother would endure to listen by the hour together. Often, it is most likely, her thoughts wandered away far enough from the present. But Mrs. Abram had no idea of taking offense at any manifestations of inattention. She was so thoroughly humble-minded that she was grateful for being admitted to mother’s companionship on any terms.

Mother could say things to her which it would have overcome her to say to me or to grandfather. For instance, as soon as she was able to be moved from her bed to a couch in the dining-room, and had put on the black garments provided for her, she commissioned Mrs. Abram to get her a widow’s cap. Mrs. Abram faithfully fulfilled her trust. And grandfather and I, understanding that mother desired not to be spoken to on the subject, made no remark when we first saw her in that dreary head-gear. Afterward, as I have said, grandfather tried once, but once only, to dissuade her from wearing it.

There was another person whose society mother gradually came to endure, and even to take something like pleasure in. This was little Jane Arkwright.

When the misfortunes I have formerly mentioned fell upon Mr. Arkwright—the execution in his house, the sale of his scanty furniture, and the turning into the street of himself, his wife, and children—he found kindness in more than one direction. The five children were sheltered at Mortlands. He and his wife were pressing invited by Alice Kitchen and her father to take up their abode for a time in the tiny house in Burton's Gardens. Alice was just about to be married, and her father was to leave Horsingham for Brookfield immediately after the wedding. But for the few days that remained of their occupancy of the house Alice begged the Arkwrights to come and stay there. "Until they could turn themselves round," as she phrased it. Mr. Arkwright was at first unwilling to accept this offer, fearing to cause ill feeling between Matthew Kitchen and his relations. "Our trouble is bad enough," he had said, in his gentle way. "Heaven forbid that we should do any thing to cause a family quarrel to grow out of it."

But Alice had energetically assured him that he need not fret himself about *that*, inasmuch as her brother was already estranged from her on account of her intended marriage, and was also deeply angered by the fact of his father's leaving his work-shop. In short, she persuaded him to accept her offer. "You can come as lodgers, of course, if you like it," Alice had said, in her blunt way; "but if you'll put up with our ways for a few days without talk of pay, why, you shall be as welcome as the flowers in May."

All this I learned from Mrs. Arkwright herself. As soon as I was able to see any one she begged to be admitted to speak with me. She was powerfully affected. I never saw any one so overcome. She tried to say a few words about the calamity that had fallen on us, and then she attempted to ask forgiveness for the harsh words she had spoken in her own misery and wrath. "If your mother would see me I'd go down on my knees to her to beg her to forgive me. I little thought when I spoke as I did—oh, Miss Furness, if you knew how bitterly I have repented my angry words, you would feel for me; and they did not come from the bottom of my heart either. But there's *one* pardon I shall never get in this world—" And Mrs. Arkwright fell to weeping silently, and with strong gasps, more like the weeping of a man than a woman.

After a while I was able to tell her that the pardon she spoke of had been freely granted to her. "He knew how misfortune puts bitter words into men's mouths, and he never blamed you—never."

She caught my hand and squeezed it so hard that she hurt me. "God bless you!" she said. "You take a thorn out of my heart."

Then she told me how she had come to Mortlands every day—sometimes twice a day—to ask for my mother; and how thankful she and her husband had been to hear at length that she was recovering. Of their own affairs she had better accounts to give than could have been expected. Their prospects were brightening. People had been very kind, understanding that Mr. Arkwright had been hardly treated, and that he was an honorable man who desired to do his duty. His rector had expressed no intention of dismissing him from his curacy.

"Edwin had almost expected that," said Mrs. Arkwright, "because he says that his case was in a measure a *scandal* for the Church. But I don't see how Christian people can look upon poverty as a scandal if they read their New Testament."

"At all events, Mr. Arkwright's rector has not done so."

"No; he—oh yes! he has been very kind. He lectured Edwin a little, but—yes, we have met with a great deal of kindness."

Mr. and Mrs. Arkwright had taken the little house in Burton's Gardens. It was very small, but the rent was low, and they took such portions of Mr. Kitchen's furniture as he did not require in his new abode at Brookfield. He had consented to be paid for it by installments. Sir Peter Bunny had made himself answerable for the schooling of the four elder children during the next six months. Several articles which Mrs. Arkwright peculiarly prized had been bought in at the sale on her behalf, and sent to her anonymously. But she knew, she said, whose hand had done them this kindness. It was Mr. Donald Ayrle, God bless him! and he had even—think of that—sent little Jane the coral necklace!

Mrs. Abram begged so hard that Jane might be allowed to remain yet a while longer at Mortlands that Mrs. Arkwright had been fain to consent. She was much softened in these days. And though it was plain that she suffered many a jealous pang in leaving her little one to the care of strangers who would pet and caress her, and whom she would learn to love, the poor woman endured them in silence.

Thus little Jane was an inmate of Mortlands. We had feared that the sight of her and the sound of her name might distress my mother; for on an attempt I made (at Mrs. Arkwright's urgent entreaty) to deliver a message from her to mother, begging to be allowed to see her, my mother fell into a violent hysterical fit, which so alarmed us that we did not dare to recur to the mention of the Arkwrights' name afterward. But in the course of two or three weeks mother voluntarily spoke of them to Mrs. Abram. "Tell Anne," she said, "that I have no rancor in my heart against the woman. I *had*—God forgive me! But I have prayed and tried to cast it out. *He* forgave her. He spoke of her to me on that—that last night. But I *can not* see her. Some day it

may be; but now I feel as though the sound of her voice would kill me."

Therefore, for some time little Jane was carefully kept out of mother's sight. The little creature herself was so impressed with awe and compassion for the "sick lady," as she called her, and so conscious that for some mysterious reason she must on no account intrude into her presence, that when she heard the slow, feeble footsteps which announced the invalid's descent down the stairs she would noiselessly steal away and hide herself; and once, after a long search, we found her sitting on the grass in a secluded corner of the garden, with her little pinafore over her head and face.

But by degrees we found that my mother was aware of the child's presence in the house, and she asked to see her; and gradually quite a friendship arose between them. Little Jane admired and idolized my mother much as Mrs. Abram admired and idolized *her*. Mother was always gentle with the child. I think she had some feeling which prompted her to force herself to endure Jane's presence as a sort of *expiation* for her refusal to see Jane's mother; but she was never affectionate, still less caressing, in her ways with her. Nevertheless, little Jane would sit for hours as quiet as a mouse, gazing up into mother's face with her solemn gray eyes, quite content to be allowed to remain by her side unnoticed.

And so our lives glided away with a sober sadness, but yet with growing peace; as river waters that have escaped, all torn and tormented and foaming, from the jagged rocks of a cataract flow onward toward the great sea, still shuddering from the awful shock; and with whirling eddies here and there, and wildly scattered foam-flakes on their surface, which tell of the mad turmoil, the horrible roar of the rapids they have passed.

CHAPTER XLI.

WHEN my mother began to be able to walk out into the garden—with the assistance of an arm to lean on, for she was weaker than an infant—grandfather said that she ought to go away to the sea-side for a while. There were sea-side places which were frequented by invalids even in the winter-time; and the air of one of these places would be at once milder and more invigorating than that of Mortlands. He would go with her, and see her settled in some quiet lodging. And she should have either Keturah or Eliza to remain with her during the whole time of her stay. Mother chose Eliza. She rather shrank from Keturah, although that good creature was thoroughly devoted to her. But I believe mother could not get over certain sharp speeches Keturah had been in the habit of making—long ago—to the effect that "Miss Lucy" might have done better—and that *she* didn't consider that any body in the world was

too good for "master's daughter." No slight, or taunt, or insult to herself could have affected her like the least disparagement of my father. If she had been happy she would have thought no more of Keturah's words; in truth, they sprang from no worse feeling than the old servant's jealous pride in, and fondness for, her master's only child; but in her deep affliction, and in the peculiar anguish (far beyond that of most bereaved wives) which attended the circumstances of it, trifles became magnified, and passing annoyances intensified into serious pain.

I was to stay at Mortlands. Firstly, my health required no such change as was necessary for my mother. Secondly, the increased expense of my accompanying her was a burden I was most averse to putting on my grandfather's already heavily laden shoulders. Thirdly, I knew, although he said not a word to that effect, that it would be some comfort for grandfather to have me with him at Mortlands when he should have returned from taking mother to the sea. His house was very lonely now since—since Donald had gone away.

As for mother, she expressed no desire to have me with her. Her absence would be short, and it was well that I should stay with grandfather, she said. She was very passive and listless, save on a few points. The fact was, her strength to suffer as well as to enjoy was nearly exhausted. Grandfather, however, had great hopes that the projected change would do her good.

"I should like to remain, and watch her progress day by day," he said; "but it is not absolutely necessary. And I ought not to be absent from Horsingham longer than I must."

He had already secured a few patients of the paying class. And had girt himself up to this work with a vigor and resolution which filled me with ever-new admiration.

The night before he and mother went away I sat up late with him talking. For the first time he spoke to me of Donald. I have said that during the worst time of my mother's illness we had neither of us looked beyond the walls of her sick-room. Now grandfather opened his heart to me.

He had always, he said, had a hope and a plan of marrying me to Donald, even from the days when we had been children together. It had failed—as such plans mostly did fail! Well, thank Heaven, he had not made or meddled importunately between us. Nor had he ever breathed a hint to Donald more than to me of the hope now frustrated.

I hid my face on his knees and cried. "Oh, grandfather," I said, scarcely knowing why I said it—the words seemed to fall involuntarily from my lips—"it is better for him as it is. But it is for you I am sorry. I have cost you the companionship, that was so dear to you, of your old friend's son. I wish I had not been such a disappointment to you!"

"Not *altogether* a disappointment, little Nan-

cy," said my grandfather, stroking my hair as he had used to do when I was a child, and smiling a little.

"But, grandfather, I do think it was not right of Donald to leave you as he did. After all you had done for him."

"I have had a letter from him."

"A letter from Donald?"

"Yes; it came at a moment when I had no thoughts to spare from my poor suffering Lucy. But I was looking it over again this morning, and—on the whole, I can't be angry with Donald, though he was rash."

"I can scarcely fancy Donald being rash!"

"Can you not? A most impetuous nature, little Nancy, especially where his affections are concerned. Gentle withal, and not greatly demonstrative. Ah! Well—he did not mean to desert his old friend altogether. He speaks of coming back at some future day, when he feels himself able to see the old place with more calmness, and when—"

Grandfather made so long a pause that I repeated, interrogatively, "And when?"

"When Anne is married and gone away," he says.

There was a silence, which neither of us broke for a long time. At length grandfather resumed:

"The letter was written two days after Donald's arrival in London. He went straight to London."

"Then he had not heard—"

"No, no," said grandfather, quickly. "No; he had heard nothing from Horsingham when he wrote. And he met with an adventure on his journey. He was robbed."

"Robbed!"

"And at the house of an acquaintance of yours. At the Royal Oak public house, near Diggleston's End, on the London Road."

"At Dodd's house? Oh, poor man; how sorry he will be! He is such a steady, honest fellow himself. Was the thief discovered?"

"No; it seems not. Donald, I fancy, would not delay his journey. He hurried on as best he could. He does not give me the particulars of the case, except that he says the man on whom suspicion bears heavily was a fellow who passed himself for a Methodist preacher. In all likelihood he was not one really. He must have had some dishonest object in view, for he was regularly disguised. Left a wig and some other things behind him at the Royal Oak. I believe that Dodd came here once or twice to try to speak to me, but I could not see him. It was during the time that your mother's fever was at its height."

"Has—has Donald given you no address where you can write to him?"

"Yes; at one of the great London hospitals."

"When he has passed the necessary examinations to enable him to practice his profession, will he come back here to you, grandfather?"

"So it was planned and hoped. But now I

should not like—I could scarcely urge him to do it."

I understood why but too well. It would have been impossible for grandfather to importune Donald to return to Mortlands now that I was there. If Donald had been rejected in the days before our utter calamity and ruin, it could not be that grandfather should urge him to come among us *now*. I felt this too; it could not be; but I was inexpressibly pained to feel it, for my grandfather's sake. Yes, honestly and sincerely I protest from my heart there was at least no selfishness in my regret. If I could have purchased for my grandfather the happiness of Donald's society at the cost of never more looking on Donald's face myself, I would have done it *then* without a murmur. I faltered out some broken words to this effect; but grandfather took me in his arms, and soothed me tenderly, and said—I will not repeat all his words, for I well know that he beheld me, as it were, transfigured in the light of his own love and goodness; but he said—

"Anne, dear as Donald is to me, you are far, far dearer. No human being, not even your dear mother, holds the place in my heart that you hold. My beloved child, I have never summoned courage to say a word to you about the sacrifice you made— There, there! cry, my child, if it eases your heart! These are not bitter tears. If I had been consulted about it beforehand I should have opposed your giving up your fortune. And you and your mother felt that, and therefore did not consult me. Yes, yes—I understand it all. But you were right, Anne. I should have been harder and more worldly, and less wise. Now the past holds that sacrifice safe forever. It is yours, and can not be taken from you. And what earthly compensation, what worldly ease and prosperity, could bring a balm to your heart *now*, like the consciousness that you did not hold back grudgingly—that you gave your utmost with a free, loving hand? God bless thee, child! I have said what it has been in my mind to say for some time past. And now go to rest and sleep!"

The next morning my mother and grandfather and Eliza set off by the mail-coach for S—, a beautifully situated town on the sea-coast. It was a small place then, but has since grown year by year into an important fashionable watering-place.

Keturah, Jane, and Mrs. Abram—I have placed them in the order of their relative importance in the household—were left with me at Mortlands. And a very secluded, nun-like, sort of life we four led in the old house together.

For myself, I did not once leave its precincts during grandfather's absence. I spent whole days in the garden despite the cold, raw, wintry weather. Keturah insisted that I should not sit out of doors as I had been inclined to do, sensibly protesting that the notion was a quite crazy one, and that grandfather would think her as crazy as I was, if she permitted such im-

prudences. But I walked about the garden and shrubbery for hours; walked until I was fain to come indoors from pure weariness. And I found that the silence and the solitude and the air did me good, and soothed me inexpressibly. In the evenings I read while Mrs. Abram knitted, and little Jane gravely received instruction in the mysteries of words of two syllables, or learned to work a sampler with colored worsteds. Mrs. Abram gave the lesson without abandoning her knitting, which indeed she could do without looking at it.

The sampler might have been the identical square of canvas on which my inexpert little fingers had been exercised so many years ago. It had the same queer patterns in brick-red and olive-green, ranged in two rows at the top as models to copy from. Also there were the letters of the alphabet, and the Roman and Arabic numerals.

Little Jane was not indocile, and was, moreover, very deft and quick with those morsels of waxen fingers. She succeeded with the sampler far better than I had ever done, and was immensely proud of it. It was a sight to which I quite looked forward every evening to behold her gray eyes solemnly dilate, and her mouth compress itself severely lest the lips should part in a smile of exultation, and the delicate pink color flush into her cheeks, as she slowly, after nearly every stitch, held out the wonderful sampler at arm's-length to gaze upon its beauties. This grave enthusiasm somewhat interfered with the progress of the work, of course. But it was finished at last. And the date, and Jane's initials—J. L. A.—worked in all the colors of the rainbow at the bottom of it. Her joy was speechless! She took the sampler to bed with her, and fell asleep with it on her pillow. I am inclined to believe that life held no subsequent triumphs for little Jane so unalloyed as the completion of that piece of work.

I was not deserted by my friends. But I had not as yet gained courage enough to see any of them. Lady Bunny had called frequently to inquire for my mother; had asked leave to send her a few bottles of some very fine old wine from Sir Peter's cellars—"wine," as she said in a few words written in pencil on her visiting card, and addressed to me, "that you can't get for money in Horsingham; do allow me the pleasure, my dear Miss Furness, it is considered so strengthening."

My old school-mistress, Mrs. Lane, who had long ago made a competency and given up teaching, and whom we had quite lost sight of for many years, made daily journeys in her little pony carriage from the village where she lived, to ask, with her own lips, how Mrs. Furness was, and to hear the answer with her own ears.

The general feeling in the town was, I afterward learned, one of unmixed sympathy with my mother. Even the trades-people, who had lost all chance of recovering their money, showed kindness and compassion in various ways.

And as to our kindred—I received a very unexpected letter from Mr. Cudberry the week before mother went away to the sea. I communicated its contents to grandfather, who agreed that we should say nothing about it to my mother for the present; and agreed with me also in the general sense of the answer which I should write to Uncle Cudberry.

CHAPTER XLII.

WOOLLING, *January 25, 18—.*

"MY DEAR ANNE,—You are now, I hope, well enough in mind and body to bring your mind to bear on what I have to say. I waited till such time as I thought your head would be clear a bit. And, not being muddle-headed by nature, I suppose it is clear by this.

"You and your mother gave up the marriage-settlement of your own accords. You was of age, and I didn't think well to refuse my consent, as you know. If I know it, says you, why does Uncle Cudberry go over the old track again? Fair and softly. I must take my time and say my say in my own way. Fair and softly goes far in a day. But as things have turned out, I feel it's a hard case for Doctor Hewson to have you and your mother on his hands at his time of life. And perhaps he may say, if Cudberry of Woolling had have held firm, my daughter and my daughter's daughter wouldn't now be depending on me for board and lodging. Not that he ever *has* said such a word to me or of me as I know of. But I put a case. Now this brings me to what I have got to say. If you will come and live at Woolling, and be as one of my own daughters, there's a home for you as long as I last. After I'm gone my son Sam will be master, but your aunt Cudberry and you have always got on very comfortable together, and I dare say you could make it out still to be with her if Sam brings home a wife to Woolling. For I sha'n't leave my wife dependent on Sam Cudberry. There'll be a comfortable maintenance for her during her lifetime. The girls each has their bit of money separate. By reason they will likely break up and go different ways when once I'm underground. Or they may get married. Any way they'll be left so as they can steer clear of each other if they are so minded. Now there's my offer, and don't say no in a hurry. Take your time. If you come to my house you'll be in every particular treated the same as the Misses Cudberry of Woolling. You'll have the same allowance for your clothes as them. Neither more nor less. You'll have the same liberty of going into Horsingham to see your mother and grandfather as my own daughters have. I expect every one in my house to understand that I am the master. But you have plenty of common-sense, and so have I, and I ain't afraid that we should quarrel. Your aunt Cudberry has been afflicting herself a great deal, as she couldn't get to see your mother or you, and she

bids me tell you that she did go to Mortlands several times, and you know she don't often stir outside the garden fence at Woolling. Why, I believe, in the five-and-forty years we've been married, she hasn't been into Horsingham a score of times, and all told. But there was no getting to see you. And she hopes you've been told that she did come, so there's your aunt Cudberry's message, with her best love. Sam and his sisters—one or t'other of 'em—have been to your grandfather's house every day. And I suppose you know it. But I don't wonder at your not wanting to see *them*. Miss Cudberry has her merits, but she ain't soft-mannered, and she's apt to be trying when folks are not strong. But your aunt Cudberry would dearly like to see you, Anne. She has been cut up terrible. She has, indeed. Her own sister's own son! And she was very fond of George. I can tell you that for many weeks ours was a real house of mourning. Well, no more on that score, and I give you my word that you sha'n't be worried by any *scenes* or any thing, if you'll let me bring your aunt Cudberry down to see you—her and me; we won't say any thing about the girls till you're more up to them. Now think of my offer. You know I'm not a romantic kind of a man. But I mean just what I say, neither more nor less. And I remain.

My dear Anne,

"Yours very sincerely,
"S. CUDBERRY."

This letter was written in a small, cramped, but very legible hand, in crooked lines, on a very large sheet of paper. And it was sealed with a massive oval lump of red sealing-wax, bearing the impression of the Cudberry arms. I was greatly surprised at the offer contained in it. Knowing Mr. Cudberry as I did, it seemed to me a very wonderful thing that he should voluntarily offer to assume the responsibility of feeding, clothing, and housing a fourth young woman in his family. For he was always lamenting the cost of supporting the three daughters who had just claims on his care and his purse. I was not ungrateful. I was really touched by this proof of Uncle Cudberry's regard. But I own that when it occurred to me that it would be my duty to lighten my grandfather's burden by accepting this offer, I shrank very greatly from the prospect of passing my life at Woolling. I thought—nay, I was sure—that I would rather earn my bread by the labor of my hands than become a member of the Cudberry household. But the point I had to consider was not by any means what I would *rather* do. And then it was easy to talk of earning my bread by the labor of my hands; but of what labor were my hands capable? Where could I find employment? The more I pondered the case the more clearly my conscience seemed to tell me that I had no right to refuse Uncle Cudberry's offer. And I own once more that I grew very cowardly and faint-hearted, and tried to fend off the growing conviction.

But when I showed the letter to grandfather, and talked it over with him, he speedily removed my scruples.

"Don't, my dear child," said he, "fall into the mistake of fancying that a given course of action must be right simply because it is painful. Self-abnegation is as much a snare and a temptation to some natures as self-indulgence is to others. But let *us* try to keep as steady a balance as may be."

Then he talked with me at length on the subject, pointing out how much more useful I could be, and—he said this because he loved me so dearly, and his love made it true in some measure—how much more happiness I could give to others around me, by remaining at Mortlands, than by going to Woolling. I had once before, he reminded me, refused to desert my mother at a time when she needed a daughter's tenderness and care far less than now. In brief, he persuaded me—not at all against my will—that the path of duty for me did not lie in the direction of Woolling. And we agreed together what manner of answer I should make to Uncle Cudberry. Also grandfather advised that I should not write at once.

"Mr. Cudberry bids you take your time," he said, "and it is due to him to let him see that you give his proposition some consideration. Write in a week."

Accordingly my letter to Woolling was dispatched the day after mother and grandfather went away to S—.

I wrote it as well as I knew how to write, and tried to make my words convey the real feeling of gratitude in my heart, and at the same time the firmness of my decision not to leave my grandfather's home. But I was very dissatisfied with the letter, after all. I had written it over twice—thinking it now too hard, and now too weak—and at last I sent off the third copy, not because I thought it satisfactory, but because I despaired of doing any better.

On the second day after the dispatching of my letter, the Cudberrys' "sociable" drove up to the garden gate at Mortlands. I had said in my letter that I should be very grateful to Aunt Cudberry if she would come and see me, and I added that I would see my cousins also, if they wished it. I thought, to say the honest truth, that I would take advantage of mother's absence to get this first interview over. It must take place some time, and I was better able to endure whatever pain might be connected with it than mother was. The first meeting would be the most trying, of course. And I own that I had not implicit faith in Uncle Cudberry's power to spare me any "scenes," as he had undertaken to do.

Mrs. Abram was with me when the Cudberrys' visit was announced. She had a profound dread of my cousins, especially of Tilly—whom I do not think she had seen half a dozen times in her life—and would fairly have run away out of the room, if I had not begged her

to remain. But I can not say that her presence had any encouraging influence, or one that tended to tranquilize my nerves.

Uncle and Aunt Cudberry came into the room first, and were followed by their three daughters. They were all dressed in deep mourning. I ought to have expected this, of course; but somehow the sight of their black garments gave me a strange shock, and contrary to all my resolutions, and despite all my efforts, I burst out crying.

I found myself, I don't know how, in Aunt Cudberry's arms. The poor woman hugged me close, and cried too, in a subdued, stealthy way, as if she were afraid of being seen. And she was altogether very quiet, and said only a broken word or two—"My dear child! My dear Anne! How are you, poor dear thing?" So that I soon grew composed, and did not again lose my self-possession. I am sure Aunt Cudberry had been lectured severely by her husband as to the necessity of behaving with tranquillity. Indeed she whispered to me, in the course of the visit, that Mr. Cudberry had threatened to "march her off without an instant's warning if she made a fuss." Also the girls appeared to be under some severe kind of discipline, which certainly had the effect of making their demeanor more quiet, if not less eccentric, than usual.

They shook hands with me, and kissed my cheek in rotation, each saying, one after the other, "Well, Anne!" And then they all sat down in a row on the sofa and stared at me, save when they chanced to catch their father's eye. He passed them in review every now and then; and when they perceived this, they looked out of the window—only to look at me again, however, so soon as he released them from his glance.

By-and-by Aunt Cudberry asked for my mother, and was curious to have all the particulars of her journey—asking how much it cost to go to S—; what I thought she would pay for a lodging; whether provisions were much dearer there than in the country, and so forth. To all which questions I made the best answers I could.

The girls, meanwhile, having, I suppose, somewhat slaked their curiosity regarding my appearance, had bestowed a good deal of attention on Mrs. Abram. With her, they were not under any awe of their father's displeasure, and they scrupled not to say what they pleased to her. Tilly had a rooted idea that Mrs. Abram was little removed from an idiot. The old story, which I had heard from the servants when a child, of her having once been in an "asylum," had doubtless reached Tilly's ears by the same channel. She regarded the unconscious Mrs. Abram with an expression of mingled repugnance and compassion, made audible remarks about her to Henny and Clemmy as coolly as though she had been deaf, and talked to her with laborious distinctness, at the same time repeating the leading word of

her phrase several times in a loud, threatening voice, such as I have heard used in teaching a dog some difficult trick.

Of the cause of Miss Cudberry's peculiar manner toward her, Mrs. Abram fortunately had no remotest idea. But it served to alarm and disconcert her terribly.

"Do you ever go out into Horsingham, Mrs. Abram?" asked Henrietta, looking at her sharply, with her head on one side.

"Into Horsingham? Oh, I—well, I sometimes—"

"Town, you know," interrupted Tilly; "shops—streets. *Streets!* Ever go into the streets, eh?"

"Not much into the streets, love—I mean Miss—a—a—Miss Cudberry."

"Ah! They don't trust her much by herself in the streets, you see," announced Tilly to her sisters. Then turning to poor Judith, "You walk in the garden, I suppose? Out there. *Garden!* where the flowers grow!"

"Not many flowers there, love—a—a—I ask pardon if I'm too familiar. It isn't the season for flowers now," observed Mrs. Abram, feebly.

Tilly stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth, apparently to prevent an explosion of laughter at the imbecility of this remark.

"Well, but *that* isn't silly," said Clemmy, in a half whisper, to her eldest sister, "because this is not the season for flowers, you know, after all."

"La, Clementina, that's you all over!" retorted Henrietta, in her waspish way. "How can you be such a goose? I do believe you scarcely know whether people have their senses or whether they haven't. It don't seem to make much difference to *you!*"

"You think a great deal of the old gentleman, don't you?" said Clementina, in a somewhat less aggressive tone than her sisters.

This was an unfortunate phrase, inasmuch as it was habitually used by Keturah to designate the evil spirit whose snares occupied so large a share of poor Judith's thoughts. And in the confusion of mind to which she had been reduced, she did not for the moment conceive that Clementina's phrase referred to any other and less terrible "old gentleman," and was dismayed and bewildered by the question accordingly.

Clementina, on her side, was a good deal amazed at the result of her words; for Mrs. Abram remained, with dropped jaw and raised hands, staring at her.

"You know who I mean, don't you?" asked Clemmy, returning the stare with interest.

I came to Mrs. Abram's rescue, for she was by this time almost reduced to tears.

"Clementina says you are very fond of my grandfather, Mrs. Abram; and I can undertake to answer that question. Dr. Hewson has no more devoted friend than his sister-in-law," said I, speaking across the room, and with some little emphasis.

My interposition had the effect of causing instantaneous silence among the Misses Cudberry; and Judith, with an imploring glance at me, took the opportunity of the young ladies' attention being attracted away from herself to slip timidly out of the room.

As soon as she was gone, Mr. Cudberry rose and placed himself with his back to the fire, so as to get us all within his range of vision. And after a short pause, during which he surveyed his wife, his daughters, and me, with an inscrutable face, he thus spoke:

"Now, Anne Furness, I got your letter. 'Twarn't a bad letter, nor yet it warn't altogether a good, because it answered my offer the wrong way. Now I made up my mind to give you another chance; and I had a word to say as I thought might be well to say before my daughters, so as there should be no mistake, you understand, but every thing clear and plain between us."

Here he turned his wooden visage toward his daughters, who bridled and tightened their lips a little, but said nothing.

Mr. Cudberry proceeded with his usual slow deliberation,

"It may be as you think you wouldn't be treated quite kind at Woolling—not in the way of victuals, or that, but—in—in—in the way of—being jawed at, in short, or envied, or—"

"*Envied*, pa!" screamed Tilly, in irrepressible indignation. "Now that I will *not* stand!"

"Steady, Miss Cudberry," said her father, without any display of emotion whatever. "You stick to your agreement, and I'll stick to mine."

"There was nothing about '*envying*' in our agreement, pa; and I wonder at you making such an accusation against your own daughters!"

"Specially when there's nothing to envy!" put in Henrietta.

"La, there now, my dears, don't ye put yourselves out, poor things!" said Aunt Cudberry, squeezing my hand furtively, and addressing her daughters in a deprecating tone.

"Now, if you have any notions of that sort, Miss Anne," proceeded Mr. Cudberry, quite ignoring the little interruption, "I can tell you as you needn't have 'em. Me and my daughters understand one another very well. I've told 'em as your coming to Woolling won't make a brass farthing of difference to them. They'll have their allowances same as usual. I sha'n't leave you any thing in my will. My will 'll stand as 'tis, *unless I'm put out and made to alter it*, which I should be uncommon sorry to have to do."

A blank look came over the faces of his daughters at these words, and an awful stillness fell upon them.

"So, therefore," said Mr. Cudberry, winding up his address, "I now make you the offer once more of coming to Woolling and being as one of us, without fear of any unkindness, or sharp words, or *envy*. No envy shall be shown

toward you in my house so long as I'm master in it." There came a sparkle into his black eyes at each repetition of the word "*envy*," which he uttered with a kind of dogged enjoyment that was very characteristic of the man.

As if acting by preconcerted arrangement, the three Misses Cudberry rose from their chairs at this point, and said, "We hope you will come, Anne," one sister uttering the words after the other, beginning, as of right, with Miss Cudberry. And each, as she spoke, kept her eyes fixed on her father.

"Do 'ee, my dear!" said Mrs. Cudberry, humbly, and gave my hand another furtive squeeze.

I could but repeat my former refusal. But I tried to tell Uncle Cudberry how grateful I was for his proffered kindness. I assured him that among my motives for not accepting it there had not been any fear of meeting with unkindness at Woolling. And then I said a word or two to my aunt and cousins, thanking them also for being willing to receive me among them.

The relief expressed in the faces of the three girls, when I made it plain that I preferred to remain where I was, was unmistakable; and, though not very flattering to me, was, I reflected, natural enough. I had never been on cordial terms with them; and, despite my best endeavors, I should infallibly have proved an element of discord in the Woolling household.

Perhaps Uncle Cudberry also was relieved at heart by my refusal, although he let no such indication appear in his countenance or demeanor. They all took their departure in a short time, and before they went I had promised to spend a day at Woolling at the end of the week. I was averse to doing so, but I could not refuse Mr. Cudberry's request.

That evening, when we had been sitting at work by the fireside for some time, Mrs. Abram raised her head, after an interval of silence, and said, "Anne, you won't be angry, love, at what I'm going to say?"

"Angry? Surely not angry at any thing you say, Mrs. Abram."

"Well, love, I— Don't you think there's something very queer about the eldest Miss Cudberry?"

"She is undoubtedly eccentric."

"Oh yes, love."

There was another pause of considerable duration. Then Mrs. Abram resumed,

"But I don't mean exactly that, love. I— You're sure you won't be angry?"

I shook my head, and smiled at her.

"Well, then, love"—and here Mrs. Abram dropped her voice to a mysterious whisper, and put her finger to her forehead—"to-day, once or twice, I did fancy that—that she was not quite right in her head!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

BEFORE my grandfather's return from the sea-side I had a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Dodd. Strictly speaking, their visit was to Keturah, who had invited them to drink tea with her. And mighty preparations she made in the way of pastry for the repast; for this was a solemn occasion—a bridal entertainment; for although Alice had now been married nearly four months, she had not yet paid a visit to her old friend Keturah. Mortlands had been no place for feasting and making merry in during that drear time when my mother lay struggling for life, and the shadow of an awful affliction brooded blackly over us.

But the world must go on. Grass and flowers will cover the traces of death and disaster. We could not expect all around us to be darkened by our eclipse. So when Keturah, with some hesitation, asked me whether I thought the master or Mrs. Furness—she never called my mother Miss Lucy now—would have any feeling against her (Keturah) inviting the Dodds to a quiet cup of tea some day, I cheerfully answered that I was sure they would have no objection to such a sober festival being held in the kitchen at Mortlands. And Keturah appeared relieved by the readiness of my reply.

Alice and her husband arrived about three o'clock in the afternoon, and came, as they said, to pay their respects to me before going into the kitchen.

Alice looked as buxom and bonny and blithe a landlady of a way-side inn as one could desire to see. But I observed immediately that she wore none of the wedding finery which she might have been expected to put on on the occasion. No gay ribbon or artificial flower brightened her attire. She wore a gray stuff gown, with a little black silk handkerchief passed under her collar and pinned at her throat. This was the more striking in Alice, inasmuch as she had always loved bright colors, from the days of the blue bead necklace she had been fond of wearing as a girl. Dodd, too, although otherwise dressed in his ordinary attire, had a narrow band of black crape round his shining new hat.

And when I noticed these things there rose such a lump in my throat and such a dimness before my eyes that I could not speak for a minute or two. I could only grasp the honest hands they proffered me in silence.

Presently Alice, who was never troubled by bashfulness, began to talk; and once set going, her tongue was sure to run on nimbly for a good while. Dodd was much more timid and constrained than his wife. But gradually he became more at ease, and, if he did not contribute much to the conversation, listened with evident complacency to Alice's voluble account of how prosperous they were, and how the little farm was thriving—they had bought a few acres of land that lay conveniently near to the Royal Oak; and what wonderful layers her poultry

proved to be, even in the winter season; and how she had taken the liberty of bringing a few new-laid eggs and one or two other trifles as a present for Mrs. Abram. It afterward proved that Mrs. Dodd's notions of a present of country dainties was on a most liberal, not to say colossal scale. The taxed cart in which she had driven to Mortlands must have creaked under the weight of the pots of jam, store apples, eggs, home-made cake, and cherry brandy that constituted Alice's present to Mrs. Abram.

Alice made a sort of apology for making Mrs. Abram the sole recipient of her gift.

"You see, Miss Anne, me and Dodd we says to each other: 'Now we haven't got any way to please Mrs. Abram, nor any thing to give her as she'll care about—for I know she never touches dainties herself—unless it may be as it 'll please her to have something to give away.' That's how we made it out. 'Little Jane and the others 'll eat the stuff, and Mrs. Abram 'll enjoy seeing 'em.'"

I thought this displayed a more delicate appreciation of poor Mrs. Abram than Alice's unassisted intellect was capable of; and I had no doubt that the thought originated with her husband.

"You came here once or twice when my dear mother was very ill to speak to Dr. Hewson. He was sorry not to see you, but he was literally night and day occupied with my mother," said I to Dodd.

"Yes, miss; I did come. I wanted to say a word to the doctor about that business at my house. But I don't know as he could have done any thing either. Mr. Donald—"

Dodd stopped himself abruptly, colored, and withdrew his eyes from my face. I fancied I could guess why. He thought that the mention of Donald's name might be painful or embarrassing to me; but I resolved to overcome any such notion.

"Mr. Donald was robbed," said I; and I was quite surprised to find that it cost me an effort to say the words in an ordinary, tranquil tone. "He wrote to my grandfather to say so, but he gave very few particulars of the case."

"Well, a very queer case it was, Miss Anne. It put me about terrible."

"Why, you were none of you sharp, I think," said Alice. "If it had been after you had a wife to look after you, instead of before, maybe the rascal wouldn't have got off so comfortable."

"Nay, lass; thou'rt sharp enough; but I don't see as thy sharpness would have done much good in this case. The police could make nothing of it."

"Police!" echoed Alice, with blunt disdain. "Why, don't I know old Hogg, the constable, and Williams, and one or two more of them? They're but a thick-headed lot. Old Hogg used to be quite intimate wi' my father when I was a little girl. Many a pipe they've smoked together. Nay, lad, I don't think any thing o' thy police!"

Dodd did not enter into the question whether the fact of Mr. Hogg having smoked many a pipe with Mr. Kitchen necessarily implied any peculiar thick-headedness on the part of the former; but he began to give me an account of the circumstances of the robbery, which I shall set down in a somewhat abridged form; for Dodd was by no means exempt from the common Horsingham failing of being excessively *long-winded*.

On the evening of the twenty-second of September, about half past eight o'clock, a man came into the bar of the Royal Oak, and asked if he could have a supper and bed there. The road had been thronged all day by vehicles, equestrians, and foot-passengers leaving Horsingham, for the races were over, and the house had been doing a brisk trade in serving casual refreshments to the thirsty, dusty passers-by. But it was chiefly a house of call. Few persons slept there, Diggleton's End being too short a stage out of Horsingham for any but foot-passengers, and the Royal Oak being a hostelry above the pretensions of ordinary tramps. Thus there was more than one clean, lavender-scented bed at liberty; and the stranger, having been shown a room, and expressed himself satisfied with it, sat down in the little parlor to await his supper. He was a singular-looking man, dressed in black, with a very bushy head of black hair, that hung down over his forehead, and a great white neckcloth wound round his throat, and partly concealing his chin and jaw.

"I didn't like the look of the chap from the first," said Dodd; "but a publican can't choose his customers by their beauty, you know, miss. I fancied he was one of them Methodys as travels in the religious line—a preacher, or something of the sort. Any way, whether he was or not, that's what he wanted to pass himself off for. For he began canting and talking about the sinfulness of the races, and pulled a great printed bill out of his pocket full of what I consider very bad language, miss. I've seen fellows distributing such bills to the folks going up to the race-course. And whether races is bad or good things, *my* opinion is, that's not the way to put a stop to 'em."

Alice looked a little grave at this; for her own former spiritual pastor had been very active in open-air preaching and bill-distributing, and the use of the vigorous sort of phraseology which Dodd—lacking the nice discrimination that perceives how circumstances alter cases—irreverently styled "very bad language."

While the supper was being got ready the black-coated stranger remained quite apart. He did not enter the bar, and seemed to desire to hold no communication with the other persons in the house. In short, he seemed to be skulking. But this peculiarity in his demeanor Dodd confessed that he had partly set down to his being "one of them Methodys." For which instance of prejudice Alice justly rebuked him.

Presently, while the supper was being cooked, Dodd was surprised to see Mr. Donald

Ayrlie enter the house. He had a little knapsack on his shoulders, and had walked from Horsingham. Dodd was still more surprised when Mr. Ayrlie asked if he could be accommodated with a bed for the night. But, of course, he readily answered in the affirmative. Mr. Ayrlie seemed tired and out of spirits. In answer to Dodd's respectful inquiries, he said that Dr. Hewson was very well; that he himself was bound for London; and that the coaches being all full in consequence of the race-week visitors taking their departure nearly all about the same time, he (Donald) had made up his mind to walk to a town some miles further on, where he hoped to get a place on a branch coach for London. Meanwhile, as it was growing late, and the night was dark and threatening, he would sleep at the Royal Oak, and resume his journey early in the morning.

In answer to an inquiry whether he would not have some food, he said yes; he supposed he had better have some supper—any thing they had. He had not eaten since the morning, and should be glad of a meal.

It occurred to Dodd that if Mr. Ayrlie had no objection he might share the supper of the traveler in the parlor; and to this Donald agreed, having previously ascertained that the stranger was not a Horsingham person. He did not wish, he said, to meet any gossiping acquaintance just then. But it seemed that the Methodist preacher—if such he were—made considerable objection on his part to having a companion at his meal. He did not wish to associate with any of the godless and depraved men who frequented race-courses!

"I got a little nettled at the fellow's blustering way," said Dodd; "and I told him that he needn't be afraid of meeting disreputable company in *my* house; and that as to frequenting race-courses, why, he'd been doing that himself, according to his own account. But I said that if that was all that troubled him, he might make his mind easy, for the gentleman was a *real* gentleman, and lived with Dr. Hewson at Mortlands, and there wasn't many people in Horsingham as wouldn't feel it an honor and a pleasure to sit down to table with Mr. Donald Ayrlie. He seemed took aback when I said the name. 'Oh,' says I, 'you've heard of him?' 'Yes,' says he, 'I've heard of him. What brings him here?' 'Well,' says I, 'I didn't take the liberty of asking him, because at the school I went to, when I was a little lad, they taught me as it wasn't good manners to ask questions about other folks' business.' He thought it over for a minute or two, and muttered something about its being 'queer enough; and then he said, 'Well, he can come, then. I may do the young man some good by my discourse.' And I nearly bit my tongue in two, to keep from giving him a bit of my mind. But you know, miss, a landlord's a landlord; and the Methody paid for his supper and bed same as another—at least I was flat enough to think so then."

Donald went to his room and deposited his knapsack there. Dodd asked him, as he came down stairs again, whether there were any money or valuables in it, and he answered yes; there was all the money he had with him in it, excepting a few shillings in his pockets. Upon this Dodd begged him to lock his chamber door whenever he left it, so long as the knapsack remained within it. Dodd had no reason to suspect the honesty of the two country servants who composed his staff of indoor assistants; but he had an uneasy feeling on that evening, which made him anxious that no risk should be run.

"Almost like a kind of a warning, wasn't it, miss?" said Dodd, with some solemnity.

But Alice, whose mind was differently constituted from her husband's, observed that it was a stupid kind of a warning, then, just enough to make folks uncomfortable, and not enough to help 'em to take care of themselves; and that, for her part, she was convinced that Dodd all the while had his suspicions of the parson, and didn't like to say so *then*, even to himself.

Donald took the landlord's advice, and locked his bedroom door when he went down to supper, and left the key hanging on a nail in the bar.

At first the meal proceeded quietly enough. Dodd was in and out of the room, serving his guests himself, and he noticed that Mr. Ayrlic gave rather short answers to the other man's talk. But when the boiled eggs and bacon, which had formed the staple of the repast, had been cleared away, and the "Methody," as Dodd persistently called him, had ordered a tumbler of hot brandy-and-water, Mr. Ayrlic said that, although he was not inclined to drink himself, he would ask for a similar jorum, and would beg Dodd to take it in their company—"for the good of the house, and for auld lang syne, Dodd," he said," recounted Dodd. "'You and I are old acquaintances, Dodd,' he says. He's a real gentleman is Mr. Donald. One of the sort as isn't afraid to be kind to folks for fear they should take advantage o' him."

"Ah!" observed Alice, sententiously, "when folks is only made of Britannia metal, lad, they want to be handled careful; but real silver or honest pewter 'll stand a deal of rubbing. No fear of taking the plating off when you're made of the same stuff *all through*!"

Dodd accepted Mr. Ayrlic's invitation—the more willingly that he thought the latter did not particularly enjoy the company of the odd-looking stranger—but he could not remain in the parlor for very long together. Once, on returning to it from some business in the bar, he heard a name he knew very well uttered in a loud voice, and saw that Mr. Donald looked very pale, and that his forehead was drawn into a stern frown, while the "Methody," leaning with both elbows on the table, and shading his eyes with his hands, was looking at him in a fixed, eager kind of way.

"What name was it that you heard spoken, Dodd?" I asked.

He hesitated an instant, and then answered, "Yours, miss."

"*Mine!*"

"'Furness,' miss. That was the name I heard," answered Dodd, in a manner which showed that he was very unwilling to say more on the subject.

After the first start of surprise I reflected that it was by no means unlikely that such a man as this itinerant preacher should have taken my father as a text whereon to expatiate against the evil and mischief of races. It was the evening of the twenty-second of September; and two days previously my father's losses had been widely enough rumored in Horsingham to have come to the knowledge of this man. I did not again interrupt Dodd's narrative; which proceeded to the following effect.

Donald speedily left the supper-table, and went to his own room. He took the key from the nail where it had been hung in the bar, and unlocked the door. The lock was out of order, and made a considerable noise when the key was turned in it. Dodd was clearing away the supper things when the grating of the lock sounded distinctly through the little house. The "Methody" asked what that was, and Dodd told him. Shortly afterward the stranger said he was fatigued, and should go to bed. He was so sleepy that he begged not to be disturbed next morning until he should call or ring. Then he went up stairs, and Dodd heard his chamber door shut. It was opposite to Donald's.

Soon afterward Donald came down stairs again. He did not feel inclined to sleep, he said, and would go out and smoke a cigar in the orchard behind the inn. The night was heavy, and he felt that he needed air. He remained out-of-doors for an hour. At the end of that time a storm, which had been gathering, burst with great fury. The thunder was loud and almost incessant, and then the rain came down with a rushing noise. Donald re-entered the house, said "Good-night" as he passed through the bar, and went up to bed.

The next morning he rose at seven, breakfasted, and asked for his bill. When he opened the division of his knapsack that had contained his money he discovered that he had been robbed. Every farthing was gone. There had been about fifty pounds, chiefly in bank-notes; but there had been a few sovereigns also. The whole house was in commotion. The servants were called up and questioned. Dodd was in dire distress. Donald, though of course much vexed at the occurrence, seemed, Dodd noticed, to be more annoyed at being detained than at the loss of his money. He could not bear the idea of being kept there, still less of having to return to Horsingham. Dodd himself ran up stairs and knocked at the "Methody's" door. He thumped and called for a minute or so in vain. Then he tried to open the door, and found it locked. A vigorous kick, however,

made it fly open, and the room was discovered to be untenanted. Dodd rushed down stairs again, bawling out that he had found the thief; but he only meant that he had found out who the thief was, for the stranger was off and away, doubtless hours ago. He had brought a little black leather valise with him. That lay open on the bed, and beside it a bushy black wig and voluminous white neckcloth.

How—when—could the robbery have been committed?

The “when” was doubtless during the hour that Donald had been walking in the orchard. The “how” was not difficult to understand. On going down stairs the second time Donald had merely turned the key and left it in the lock of his door. No grating noise had been heard; but that ceased to be surprising when, on examination, it was found that the lock had been copiously *oiled*. The oil had been taken from a lamp that burned in the passage. A torn bit of paper was found on the floor inside Donald’s room, on which the robber had evidently wiped the oil from his fingers. It was part of a letter. Mr. Ayrlie had picked it up, the servant-woman told her master. Dodd asked Mr. Ayrlie for it, as it might furnish an important clew for the tracing of the thief. But Donald had said, “Oh no; it could not be of any use. It was an illegible scrap of writing.” He was much more anxious to pursue his journey than to remain and be worried by the Horsingham police, who would in all probability fail to find the thief, after all. How could they describe him? The man had been disguised. Who could tell what he looked like without the wig and neckcloth?

In short, it ended in Donald’s borrowing ten pounds of the landlord to take him to town, and setting off without waiting to give any evidence to the constable, who did not arrive at the Royal Oak until some minutes after Donald’s departure. And from that day forth no trace of the Methodist preacher had been found, nor had the thief been discovered. It could not be doubted that the disguised stranger and the robber were one and the same. Perhaps a London thief who had come down, as many did, expressly to glean a harvest at the races; though Dodd admitted that Mr. Hogg had declared he didn’t believe it was done by a “professional” hand.

“Mr. Hogg, indeed!” cried Alice. “Why, what should *he* know? There ain’t much gumption in old Hogg!”

“It is a very strange business,” said I. “How was it that when Don—Mr. Ayrlie returned to his room, and turned the key he had left in the lock, he did not notice that it went smoothly and made no noise? For the robbery must have been committed by that time as you suppose.”

“That very question I asked him, miss,” replied Dodd, nodding his head twice or thrice. “And the fact is, that if the house had been still he *would* have noticed it. But you see that by

that time the thunder and the rain were making such an uproar that it put any littler noises out of one’s head. And then Mr. Donald said as he had been thinking of a many things, and his mind was so full of his own thoughts he didn’t much heed what was under his nose. He didn’t seem himself at all, didn’t Mr. Donald—Mr. Ayrlie, I should say. But you see, miss, I remember him when he was a little short, blue-eyed chap, as wanted to catch the black bull at Water-Eardley with a rope and a running loop. He said that was the way they done in South Ameriky. Lord, what a nice little boy he was! Anyway, he *didn’t* notice as the lock had been oiled, and so he lost his money!”

And this ended Dodd’s history of the robbery at the Royal Oak.

CHAPTER XLIV.

My grandfather came back from the sea, having seen mother comfortably established in her lodgings there. And after his return he began to work in earnest, and found a good deal to do already. He labored hard, because nothing would have induced him to abandon his poor patients; and as the number of those who paid him increased, his time began to be very fully occupied.

Mother derived so much benefit from her stay at S—— that grandfather advised her remaining there for a longer period than had at first been determined on. She obeyed him somewhat reluctantly; for, with returning health and strength, her living interest in those dear to her returned also, and she longed to be with us at Mortlands.

Meanwhile our life there—the life of us women folks—was one of almost nun-like seclusion. Nevertheless, we heard occasional tidings of the outer world.

Of Gervase Lacer many rumors reached me—rumors, that is to say, dating from the period of his stay in Horsingham and Brookfield. For nothing had been heard of him, so far as I knew, since he had left our part of England.

Alas, I heard nothing but evil of Mr. Lacer! And much—most—of the evil that I heard I knew to be true. But my feeling for him was always one more of pity than anger. He had done ill, he had been weak, false, and selfish. It was all true. Still I did believe (and do believe) that the story of his neglected youth was in the main an accurate one, and I pitied him. But in Horsingham there was no voice raised in his favor; and, truly, I could not wonder at it. He had left debts there and at Brookfield. He had disappeared stealthily and suddenly. He had borne a very bad character among his brother officers. He was a swindler, a blackleg—in brief, there was no word too bad for him. My kind friends, the Bunnys, were especially furious against him. Sir Peter could not, he said, get over the mortification of having introduced such a person to his friends. “A fellow of the low-

est origin, I'm told. If he had even been a man of family! But he deceived me on that score. I give you my word, he deceived me completely."

Of Matthew Kitchen I heard that he was—not popular, but prosperous. He was growing rich very rapidly. Water-Eardley, or at least the property upon it, had been sold by auction. When Mr. Kitchen's claims were satisfied there remained little for the other creditors. The remainder of the lease had also been sold. The purchaser of it, to every one's surprise, was the dissenting preacher whose ministrations the family of the Kitchens had attended for many years. But that person did not hold his purchase long. It presently appeared that Mr. Matthew Kitchen himself was the real buyer. He sublet every acre of the land to a neighboring farmer, saving only the garden and shrubbery, and within a very short time he and his family were installed in my old home. It was a strange turn of Fortune's wheel, I thought, which had made Selina mistress of Water-Eardley Manor.

Between Alice Dodd and her brother there was a breach which grew wider day by day. They rarely saw each other. Mrs. Matthew Kitchen declared that she could not invite the wife of a publican to visit her. Selina's native, stolid self-sufficiency had grown to portentous proportions with her growing prosperity. She did no active harm. She obeyed her husband, and reared her children, and ruled her household, and performed the public ceremonies (whatever they were, I know periodical new bonnets entered into her conception of them) of her religion. A most respectable woman! Who could say a word against her? And yet I have rarely come in contact with a character which had so little that was *humane* as Selina's.

From Woolling there came from time to time vague murmurs, like the sound of a distant sea, of—an impending marriage in the Cudberry family. Mrs. Hodgekinson's son was supposed to be paying marked attention to one of the young ladies. I did not know, and I do not know to this day, why Mr. William Hodgekinson was commonly spoken of by the appellation of "Mrs. Hodgekinson's son." He was Mr. Hodgekinson's son also, but no one ever mentioned his father. Neither did they usually call him briefly Will Hodgekinson, or Young Hodgekinson, or Mr. Hodgekinson junior. No; he was almost invariably "Mrs. Hodgekinson's son." I wondered sometimes whether, when he should be married, the world would speak of him as "Young Mrs. Hodgekinson's husband!" and—contemplating the probability of his marrying Tilly Cudberry—I really thought it very likely. I even allowed my fancy to conjure up a time when he might be known to mankind as "Miss Hodgekinson's papa!"

We received no hint of any matrimonial project direct from the Cudberrys; so, of course, on the not very frequent occasions when I saw my cousins I refrained from asking questions

which time would infallibly answer if I held my tongue and waited.

The spring came, and then my dearest mother returned to us, wonderfully strengthened and restored. It must not be supposed, however, that she was ever again the pretty, bright, youthful-looking mother whom—despite traces of care and sorrow—I had seen on the day on which she kissed me and blessed me and signed away her marriage-settlement; that had been a delicate-complexioned, brown-haired, graceful woman who seemed barely to have reached middle life. The figure that I received in my arms on the threshold of Mortlands was a very different one. In the first place, it was bent and bowed. It was an *old* figure. Then the face was sallow and colorless, the still abundant hair gray, the mouth tremulous. But the eyes—the eyes were those of my own darling mother! soft, clear, and sad—as they had ever been—and full of ineffable sweetness. She had gained considerable outward calm; and she talked to us all almost cheerfully. A little pale gleam of sunlight flickered over the surface of her spirit. What dark and undying sorrow lay within its depths God only knew; she never spoke of it.

Little Jane's joy at mother's return was characteristically intense and undemonstrative. She sat quiet and attentive until the first words of welcome and the first bustle of arrival were over. Then, having waited her opportunity with astonishing self-control, she toiled up stairs—a laboring journey, for little Jane's legs were still very small, and had never been very strong—and brought down her sampler and laid it on mother's lap.

I do not think mother would have noticed it—at all events she might not—had I not luckily guessed the child's errand, and prepared my mother to admire the great work.

Jane flushed and grew pale at the praises which mother bestowed upon it. Presently she said, with earnest, dilated eyes,

"I *would* give it to 'oo; but my own muvver must have it. My own muvver would be so sorry if I didn't give it to her. 'Oo wouldn't. 'Oo don't love Jane de best; but I love 'oo."

Mother had been with us again about two months—they had glided away with peaceful monotony—and the summer was near at hand, when one afternoon my grandfather sent for me to his study. It was an unusual hour, and an unusual summons, and I entered with a little trepidation. Grandfather's face did not altogether reassure me. There was sorrow in it, but something besides sorrow which I could not decipher.

"Anne," said he, holding out his hand to me, "Donald's father is dead."

"Oh, grandfather!"

"He died in India. Poor Steenie! We were children together. I—I was very fond of him." Grandfather hid his face in his hands for a few minutes. I did not interrupt his sorrow. My own eyes were dim.

"Well," said grandfather, raising his head and tossing back his thick white hair with a quick, decisive motion that was habitual with him, "now I have something else to say to you. I'm going to ask your opinion, or rather to ask you to approve—approbation is the only comfortable sort of advice, you know, little Nancy—to approve what I have done. I have written to Donald."

He stopped.

"Yes, dear grandfather?"

"And have begged him to come down here without delay."

"Here! To Mortlands?"

"Yes, child. I must see him. It is right that I should. I don't think he will refuse to come to his father's old friend at this moment. Do you think he will, Anne?"

"No—no, dear grandfather. I—I don't think he will refuse to come to you."

"And you, Anne—will you forgive me if I put you to a little pain in meeting Donald? You will bear that for me?"

"Oh yes, dearest grandfather! And please don't mind my crying a little. Don't misunderstand my tears. It makes me think so of the old days. It brings back that birthday story you told me once about yourself and 'Steenie,' school-boys together, and that first evening that Donald came—and—and—let me cry! Oh, let me cry a little; it will ease my heart!"

CHAPTER XLV.

It was more than eight months since I had seen Donald when he arrived at Mortlands. He did not come down immediately on my grandfather's summons, having to prove Captain Ayrle's will, and to arrange a good deal of business connected with it. But he (Donald) lost no time in writing to my grandfather, and in assuring him that he would come and see him as soon as it was possible for him to do so.

Captain Ayrle had died possessed of a considerable fortune, all of which—with the exception of an annuity to an old body-servant, a mourning ring to my grandfather, and one to Colonel Fisher, and a few such trifles—he bequeathed unconditionally to his son.

The same mail which brought the tidings of his death brought also a long letter from him to my grandfather. He had written it but two days before he died.

In it he said that he had for some time been aware that his days were numbered, and that, although his physicians encouraged him to hope for some years of life, he himself neither expected nor desired to live very much longer. He was quite willing to go to his rest, feeling old and lonely, and having done his work in the world.

"Old!" cried I, when my grandfather read me this portion of the letter. "Why, he was younger than you are, grandfather."

"Yes, a few years—four or five, I suppose. But I have not lived thirty years of my life in India; and, besides, my work *isn't* yet quite done. I hope to make a shift to hobble on until it is done, little Nancy. Steenie *was* lonely, you see. His boy was almost a stranger to him. He could scarcely look forward to having Donald out there; and as to *his* coming to England, he had given up the idea years ago. He had got into a certain routine of life—into certain habits and customs—and it would never have suited him to begin all over again, as it were. Poor Steenie was the gentlest, sweetest-natured, most high-minded fellow imaginable from a boy upward. But he had a good deal of soft indolence in his character—a good deal of *vis inertiae*."

"That is not like Donald," said I, musingly.

"Donald! Donald! Good Heavens, no!" cried my grandfather. "Donald is about as energetic a human being as I ever encountered in my life. And he wastes no power in *fuss*. His poor father wrote me all this long letter about him. His wish was that Donald should stay near me. He says that in the young man's letters to India he has always spoken of me as having been a second father to him, that all Donald's affections seem centred here, and that it is a great consolation to him—to Captain Ayrle, that is—to feel that his son is surrounded by true friends. 'For,' he writes, 'Donald loves the familiarity of friendship; he is shy and warm-hearted, like his dear mother; and he would find life a dreary business without kindness and affection.'"

"So we most of us should, I suppose," said I.

"Some natures can do better without them than others. Don't you fancy that if you gave Sam Cudberry Donald's money, and liberty to do as he pleased with it, he would not be apt to pine or find life savorless for want of affection? You smile at the very notion. Poor Steenie goes at some length into money-matters, explaining to me the particulars of his fortune; and he charges me to give Donald my best advice as to the disposal of it. My advice on such points will not be worth much, but I look on Steenie's last request—which he makes to me with a good deal of solemnity—as sacred. And therefore I have, as I told you, begged Donald to come here and let me talk with him and show him his father's letter."

On a fair evening at the end of May Donald arrived at Mortlands. Long bluish shadows were lying on the grass-plot in the garden. A nightingale, hidden in a tangle of fresh young foliage, was preluding in low, rich, liquid tones, and had not yet burst forth into the full rapture of his song. I have never understood why the nightingale's note should be termed sad and lamenting. To me—even when I have been most sorrowful myself—it has ever seemed the very soul of rapture; an intense, quivering rapture, such as no other sound conveys to my imagination. It is true that in its very ecsta-

sy there is something akin to pain, something suggestive of the mysterious sadness which underlies our highest joys—and our highest joys *only*.

Mother had been prepared for Donald's arrival, but she showed no agitation such as we had feared might overcome her at the sight of him. Ever since her return from the sea-side she had been free from any hysterical attack. Nothing seemed to have much power to excite emotion in her. I was often reminded when I looked at my mother of the words of a song I had heard years ago:

"I have a silent sorrow here,
A grief I ne'er impart;
It breathes no sigh, it sheds no tear,
But it consumes my heart."

We were all sitting out in the garden when Donald arrived—all we women, that is, for grandfather awaited him in his study.

My mother was lying half reclined in an easy-chair just outside the dining-room window, Mrs. Abram was near her, in the shadow, knitting, of course, and with a queer little tract lying open on her knee, and embellished with a wood-cut which I am convinced could have had nothing to do with the letter-press; for it represented a young woman in a low gown and a straw hat trimmed with flowers, standing at a cottage door in apparently tender conversation with a youth attired in the extreme of fashion of about the year 1810.

Little Jane was gravely studying her next day's lesson in the spelling-book, seated on the ground not far from mother's chair. I had a book, but was not reading. I was lazily listening to the nightingale, and drinking in the sweet evening scents, and letting the calm minutes float by me—watching *their course*, almost, as one watches the ripples of a stream.

We had heard no sound of arrival when Donald appeared among us. Keturah, it seemed, had been on the watch for him, and had taken him into my grandfather's room at once. Donald had been at Mortlands nearly an hour before I saw him.

He bent over my mother and took her hand. He shook hands also with Mrs. Abram. Then he turned toward me. At first I believe he was going merely to bow to me; but I held out my hand, and he took it for an instant, and then relinquished it in silence.

I can not express the chill at my heart which Donald's demeanor gave me. It was like a numbing blow. I was instantly depressed, and shrank into myself, remaining silent, or speaking in monosyllables.

I had expected to feel some pain in meeting Donald, but not this pain.

Presently my grandfather came to the dining-room window and called us in. It was too late, he said, for mother to remain out-of-doors; there was a heavy dew falling.

We all obeyed his summons, and entered the dining-room; and Keturah brought tea and meat, and we sat round the table and ate and

drank, and some attempts were made to converse with ease and cheerfulness; but it would not do. That first evening was altogether blank and disappointing. How could our life go on if all our subsequent intercourse were to be equally constrained?

I saw grandfather watching me uneasily, and glancing from me to Donald, and from Donald to me. I feared that he—who had not seen our first meeting—would blame me for the coldness which was manifest enough. And yet I felt that in this case I was not blamable. There was no opportunity for explanation between grandfather and myself that night. I told myself, in reflecting upon the events of the evening in my own room, that Donald must be excused for his chilling manner on our first meeting; that he possibly was unaware how severe his demeanor had been toward me; that without any doubt he too had suffered—he was too utterly sincere for me not to believe in the reality of the attachment he had formerly professed for me, and in the grief he had shown on that day when we parted at Water-Eardley—and that in a day or two he would recover self-command enough to resume something of his old familiar manner toward me. I told myself all this, and it sounded sage and reasonable; but—it was utterly unconvincing. My heart would not be thus logically comforted, and—shall I confess it?—I cried myself to sleep.

The next day Donald behaved to me in the same chilling way, and the next day, and the next day after that. His intercourse with the rest of the family became genial as of old. To my mother he resumed the respectful tenderness he had shown her from his childhood. To Mrs. Abram, to little Jane, to the servants, he was his own old self, softened and made naturally graver by the losses and sorrows which had befallen him and us. But to me he never softened. He avoided me whenever it was possible to do so, and when he was compelled by circumstances to address me, it was with a rigid formality which was never for a moment relaxed.

After enduring a week of this, I went to my grandfather and told him that, loth as I was to do any thing which might make his position difficult, or which might cause him pain, I felt it to be impossible for me to go on living under the same roof with Donald Ayrle, eating at the same table, forming part of the same family circle, while he plainly showed me, in every look and every tone, that my presence was irksome and distasteful to him. And that I would ask his (grandfather's) leave to pay a promised visit to Woolling. I had no doubt I should be able to extend the visit to a few weeks, by which time Donald would in all likelihood have departed from Mortlands.

Grandfather was distressed by my words. And he was all kindness and affection to me. But he was unable to deny that Donald was treating me badly. He was grieved, surprised,

puzzled, he said; but he could not deny the fact.

"And what, after all, have I done to merit such treatment, grandfather?" I said. "If Donald had ever—had ever—felt for me as he once professed to feel, surely he could not have grown thus rancorous. It is unreasonable—cruel!"

I broke down, and cried bitterly. My womanly pride would have prevented me from yielding to this weakness in Donald's presence; but I was so sure of grandfather's sympathy, so confident that he would not misinterpret my emotion, that I gave way to it, after a momentary struggle, unrestrainedly.

"Come, come, my dear child," said grandfather, stroking my hair fondly, "this will never do! I can not have my little Nancy made unhappy. I can not have her driven from my house for all the Donalds in the world. He has some crotchet in his head; there is some misapprehension. I must try to set it right."

"Oh, pray, dear grandfather, say nothing to Donald about this! I could not bear that he should think—that he should fancy—"

"Have no fear, my Nancy, that I shall compromise your feminine dignity. Donald shall fancy nothing but the simple truth, so far as I am able to set it before him."

However, I still persisted in my project of going to Woolling for a little time. I wrote to Aunt Cudberry, who returned a cordial invitation to me to come and stay for as long a time as I could. Grandfather, after a little opposition, came round to my plan. In truth, I felt that some change was becoming absolutely necessary for me. I was nervous, and wretched. I had now no special active duties to perform for my mother. I could be well spared for a week or two. Even grandfather would miss me less, now that he had Donald. The daily meeting with Donald—hoping each morning to find in him some semblance of his old self, some beam of the former frank kindness toward me in his eyes—and the daily disappointment of his cold and distant greeting, was almost more than I could bear. I felt so helpless, so unable to appeal to our old affectionate friendship. My tongue was tied, my spirit was fettered, by the remembrance of Donald's declaration at Water-Eardley. How could I go to him and beg him to take me back into his heart? How could I do so—*now*? My feeling toward him fluctuated. Sometimes I thought that, but for the remembrance of that day when he had asked me to be his wife, I could have knelt down before him and taken his hand, and cried, "Donald, let us love each other and trust each other as we did when we were children. If I have pained you, forgive me. Be kind and gentle with me, Donald, for I have suffered greatly, and my heart is sore."

At other times my pride rose, and my sense of justice was outraged by his frigid demeanor. What had I done, after all? How had I mer-

ited to be so treated? I had never willingly deceived him by word or deed. It was too harsh, too unreasonable. I would shake off my depression, and care no more for one who evidently had ceased to care for me.

But whatever other phase of feeling I passed through, I never attained to that of *not caring*.

Mother expressed a little surprise at my determination to go to Woolling. Would they behave kindly and considerately to me there? She was afraid they would be rough, and that I should find myself in an uncongenial atmosphere. But she did not seriously oppose my going from the first; and when grandfather told her that I was running the risk of growing morbidly sensitive and depressed, and that a change—even a change to the society of not too sympathetic persons—would do me good in mind and body, she even urged me to depart.

Accordingly one day I had my clothes packed in a little black box, and quietly mounted in a fly from Horsingham, to be driven to Woolling. Mr. Cudberry had offered to send for me; but I preferred to go in my own fashion.

As the fly left Mortlands garden gate Donald appeared, on his way home to dinner, and the driver of the fly knowing him, and seeing him glance curiously to discover the occupant of the vehicle, touched his hat and pulled up to give Donald an opportunity of speaking to me.

I was heartily vexed at the man's proceeding; but there was no help for it.

"Oh, Anne! Is it you?" stammered Donald, in considerable surprise, when he saw me.

"Yes; I—I—am going—"

"Going! You are not going away?"

There was more impulse and warmth in his manner as he leaned forward into the coach to look at me than I had encountered from him for many a long day. For once his cold manner would have been the best for me. It would have given me courage. The little gleam of sunshine melted me. I could scarcely speak, and made a desperate and not wholly successful struggle to keep back my tears.

"I am going on a visit. I—I have not been quite well, and the—the—change is thought good for me. Good-by."

I signed to the driver to go on. As he drove away I leaned back in a corner of the coach and covered my face with my handkerchief; not, however, before I had seen Donald's face for one brief moment as he stood, hat in hand, beside the garden gate and looked after me. He looked very sad. There was a wistful, tender expression in his eyes, and his forehead was knitted into painful lines. It seemed as if—almost as if he was sorry to see me depart.

And yet how could that be? He had shown me that my presence irked him; so, of course, he could not regret me.

Besides—



CHAPTER XLVI.

I OCCUPIED a rambling, sloping-floored chamber in the old part of the house at Woolling. I had chosen it myself. A long occupation of the guest-chamber at Woolling was dreadful to my imagination. It had been prepared for me by Uncle Cudberry's express order. He never interfered in the household arrangements save when his wife or daughters sought to relax his tight grip of the purse-strings. But on this occasion he had, as he told me, explicitly commanded that the *best* spare room in his house should be prepared for me. However, I persuaded him (after having tenanted it for one night) to allow me to change my quarters.

The best room was stuffy, low-pitched, small-windowed, carpeted, curtained, dreary beyond description. Drab hangings of some thick woollen stuff excluded all air from the bed, whereon were piled feather-stuffed pillows and a great mass of down covered with blankets and counterpanes, which it made one gasp to look upon in the hot summer weather. My new chamber was bare and poorly furnished enough; but one breathed there, and could get a pleasant peep at the landscape behind the house from the old-fashioned lattice windows in the thickness of the wall. These reasons I alleged for wishing to occupy it; but there was, besides, another reason, which I could scarcely avow, but which was a powerful one with me. In the "best" room I should have been exposed to frequent incursions from my cousins, whereas in the old part of the house I was much more secluded and inaccessible.

I think that I rather conciliated the girls—unconsciously I am bound to confess—by removing from the best room. My occupying it at all had been contrary to those mysterious traditional laws which governed the home life of the Cudberry family. That sacred apartment was for elder guests. I was too young and altogether too insignificant to have any right to the dignity which was conferred by sleeping therein.

No limit had been fixed for my stay. I was to remain, Uncle Cudberry said, as long as I liked, and the longer the better. In my own mind I had resolved not to return to Mortlands until Donald should be gone, unless any unexpected circumstance should meanwhile make my presence desirable to my mother or grandfather. But I said nothing about my resolution at Woolling.

The days passed away monotonously, but peacefully on the whole. Little sharp speeches and the general *angularity* of character which distinguished my cousins hurt me no more as they had once done. My mind and heart were now preoccupied with other and graver things. They all saw and said—for their candor in expressing any thing unpleasant was quite perfect—that Anne had grown dull and mopish and "quite like an old woman." But they would add to this observation others such as the fol-

lowing: "Oh, well, of course, you know, it can't be expected that Anne should have got over all the troubles so quick!" or "Ah, I don't suppose that you'll ever be what you were again, Anne Furness. And perhaps, on the whole, it is for the best; for your spirit was terribly high—now wasn't it?"

But, on the whole, as I have said, the days went by peacefully. I was able to spend a good many hours by myself. The inclination for solitude had grown on me of late. The Cudberrys considered it part of my general "mopishness," and, luckily, did not take it as a personal affront to the family. I used to sit up in the sloping-floored room I had chosen and stare out over the landscape for hours at a time. The house would be quite silent—that part of it at all events—and the summer sunlight would quiver on the floor, and cast there the shadows of the diamond-paned lattice; and the flies would buzz around me with a sleepy sound, and the whole air would seem to be the quintessence of dreamy indolence, which entered into one's very blood.

Once Uncle Cudberry asked me what I did up there in my room all the morning; and when I most truthfully answered, "Nothing," he shook his head, and gave me a lecture against listless idleness.

"Oh, Uncle Cudberry," said I, "we are born not only to *do*, but to be and to suffer. Let me 'be' and 'suffer.' I feel a sort of vegetable life in me when I sit at the open window with the air breathing on my forehead. I don't know that I am altogether idle; I am 'being.'"

Neither the girls nor poor dear Aunt Cudberry in the least understood this speech; but I think Uncle Cudberry did, for he snubbed Tilly when she screamed out in hilarious disdain of my stupidity, "Good gracious, Anne! A vegetable life! What will you say next? And comparing yourself to a verb—'to be,' 'to do,' or 'to suffer!' Well, for my part, I should be very sorry to get into that condition. I always had an active mind, and always shall have."

Upon which her father told her that an active mind and an active tongue were by no means the same or even similar things. And he took care that I was not molested in my solitary hours after that.

Sam Cudberry was not very frequently at home during the day. To use his own phrase, he "fought shy" of me. I reminded him of unpleasant topics. Indeed, he frankly said that he couldn't bear being made to remember any thing disagreeable; and that he couldn't look at me without remembering how he had been "let in" by Lacer; and he should think that *that* was disagreeable enough for a fellow, wasn't it? By Jove! In answer to some inquiries of mine he admitted that the extent to which Gervase Lacer had cheated him was only by defrauding him of the amount he (Sam) was to have received as a bribe for holding his tongue about the fatal race-horse whose failure had ruined us all. "He *did* want to borrow some

ready tin," said Sam, with a cunning grin; "but I wasn't quite so green as all *that* comes to!—not if S. Cudberry, Junior, was aware of it. But he did me all the same, because I stumped up something to make my sister Tilly hold her tongue. And she got a sort of hold upon me; and she got the money, and I got—nothing! And you catch Tilly giving up a dump when she's once grabbed it! And once, when soft sawder didn't do when I tried to coax her out of what she'd had of me on false pretenses, and I tried to bully her, she threatened to go to the governor and split upon the whole thing then and there. That's a nice kind of sister for a fellow to have, isn't it? So you see, Anne, you can't wonder at my not particularly enjoying the sight of your countenance at the family dinner-table."

I very coolly assured him that our distaste for each other's society was quite mutual, but that so long as I remained the guest of his father and mother I should take care to treat him with civility. And so we remained on perfectly peaceable terms.

But, coarse, selfish, and unfeeling as Sam Cudberry was at all times, something had occurred quite recently to ruffle his temper to an unusual degree. He had been paying assiduous court to Barbara Bunny, and Barbara Bunny one day point-blank refused him. There was no disguise or concealment about the fact in the family. Sam came home and complained loudly of Barbara's behavior. It was a curious scene, and I witnessed it all very quietly from a corner behind Aunt Cudberry's arm-chair in the drawing-room, where we were all assembled after dinner.

"It's come to something, I think," said Sam, stamping about the room, and beginning to pull off a pair of lavender-colored gloves he had donned for the occasion (for Sam had not been dining at home, but had passed the morning at Horsingham)—"it's come to something when a Cudberry of Woolling is refused by a Bunny!"

Here he gave his smart glove a violent wrench; but being suddenly restrained by prudential considerations, he stopped, looked at it, drew it off carefully, folded it within its fellow, and put them both into his pocket.

"Refused? Never!" screamed the girls in chorus.

"La, my! Well, there now, never mind, poor dear thing!" said Aunt Cudberry, with an agitated voice, and her most gutta-perchian changes of countenance. A stranger would have supposed her to be smiling affably had he looked merely at her mouth, and to be on the point of crying had he confined his attention to the upper part of her face.

"Never mind, ma!" echoed Tilly. And certainly it *was* a singular phrase wherewith to address a rejected wooer. But Tilly did not regard it merely in that light, for she proceeded: "Oh, it's all nonsense never minding! But you would see the family trampled in the mire, for all you'd care, ma. But *Bunnys* are not going to gallop quite over us, I hope! Not *Bunnys*!"

"This is your friend, Miss Anne," said Sam, suddenly turning to me. "What do you think of this?"

"Really, Sam, my predominant feeling is surprise. I had no idea that you intended to propose to Barbara."

"Well, p'r'aps not; but *she* had, I can tell you."

"I have never, to speak honestly, seen any thing in Barbara's manner toward you which could be taken for encouragement."

Here Henny observed in an audible "aside" that people's notions differed, and that Anne's idea of what was encouragement to a gentleman and what wasn't might possibly vary very widely from the standard of demeanor which was expected in Sir Peter Bunny's daughter. Henrietta was always peculiarly venomous toward me; but I had not the smallest intention of allowing myself to be tempted into a quarrel with her; so I proceeded, addressing Sam—

"But though I must render this justice to Barbara, I am very sorry, Sam, for your disappointment. And if your feelings were engaged—"

"Oh, feelings be blowed! You don't fancy I'm a-going to fret myself about *her*, do you? And as to disappointment, I know whose the loss is, I flatter myself."

Well as I thought I knew my second-cousin, I stared at him in momentary surprise on hearing this speech. He caught my look, and regarding me sideways sulkily, said,

"Well?"

"Well—I—well, then, since you are neither heart-broken nor even greatly disappointed, I confess I don't see what you complain of."

Here I was fallen foul of by the whole party. Even Aunt Cudberry shook her lopsided cap at me, and said,

"Why, deary me, Anne, think what they sprung from, poor things, you know!"

The girls were furiously indignant, and Tilly was impelled by the excitement of her wrath to rise to quite lofty regions of eloquence. If Bunnys were to trample on Cudberrys of Woolling, what hold-fast and security remained in the world for law and order? Even Virtue's self might be disdained and disregarded, at that rate. And could I—I who had the honor to be, however distantly, connected with that family—excuse and condone the presumptuous temerity of a Bunny? Tilly was sorry for my state of mind if I could do so.

"Why, come," said I, in a momentary lull of the storm I had raised, "after all, the whole matter amounts to this: Miss Bunny and Lady Bunny and Sir Peter may all entertain the highest respect for your family, only Barbara does not like Sam well enough to marry him. You can't pretend that she is bound to fall in love with him merely because his name happens to be Cudberry! Suppose a similar thing to take place here, would any of you think yourselves obliged to marry the first man that asked you, whether you liked him or not, just because he had a longer genealogy than you have?"

"One of *us*!" cried the three sisters, in shrill scorn. And then Tilly added, with extraordinary emphasis, "Oh, that's a *very* different thing!"

And, what is strange, but true, she really thought so.

When Uncle Cudberry came to be told of Sam's unsuccessful suit he displayed no such violent indignation as his children had done; but he was obviously displeased. He vented his displeasure, however, chiefly on the head of Sam for having ever entertained the idea of allying himself with what Uncle Cudberry called "them sort of breed."

"And pray what was you a-going to live on, S. Cudberry, Junior, if I may take the liberty of inquiring?" said he, at supper that evening, in his driest manner.

"Why, Barbara 'll have something. Her governor means to shell out pretty handsome for her. Of course I found that out beforehand; and you've been telling me for two or three years past that when I married you'd make some suitable arrangement for me. You know you've said so."

"Ay, ay, if so be you'd ha' married to please me, son Samuel. And as to two or three years, my lad, it's a sight longer ago than that! For you are—let me see—how old is our son, Mrs. Cudberry?"

"Forty-two next Michaelmas, poor dear," replied his wife, in a plaintive tone.

"You're a old bachelor, you know, that's what you are. In fact," looking round on his discomfited offspring, "you're every one of you getting on in life. I don't see much chance for you. Even Sam here, as can do, as you girls can't, go and ask some 'un to have him, it's no go. The lass sends him off with a flea in his ear! Maybe that when I'm under the turf, and Sam Cudberry the younger reigns in my stead, some woman or other 'll marry him to be mistress of Woolling. But on his own merits—dash me if I don't begin to think it's a poor look-out altogether!"

It was in this way that Mr. Cudberry displayed the mortification and ill-humor which Sam's rejection had evidently caused him. His three daughters retired from the table in a quiver of speechless anger, and his wife shed abundant tears. Sam was the most unconcerned of the party.

I really pitied the girls, and would have said some kind or soothing word to them if I had been permitted to do so; but at my first attempt they flounced off to their own rooms, and for once I could sympathize with their irritated feelings.

I was sitting at the open window in my bedroom at about half past ten o'clock that night, when I was startled by a very gentle tap at the door. At that time all was quiet. The household kept early hours, and there was no sound of voice or footstep to be heard. I had put out my candle, and there was no light in my room save a faint glimmer near the window from the starry sky.

I listened nervously, and in about a minute the tap was repeated. By this time my intellect had arrived at the conclusion—doubtless obvious already to the reader—that any person coming to my room with a felonious intention would undoubtedly omit the ceremony of knocking at the door. So I called out softly, "Who is there?"

"Me!" was the ungrammatical but reassuring response; for I recognized Clementina's voice in the utterance of the monosyllable.

I immediately opened the door and admitted her. She must have groped her way up in the dark, for she held no light in her hand. And, indeed, the regulations as to the quantity of candle allowed per week to each bedchamber were very stringent at Woolling, and necessitated the greatest care if one desired not to be obliged to go to bed in the dark.

"Why, Clemmy," said I, "is it you? Come in. Is there any thing the matter?"

"Oh, nothing particular. It's only—only about me."

I made her come and sit down near me by the window; and, though the night was warm, I threw a shawl over her shoulders, for she had come from her own room in her petticoat and a little thin white jacket, and had removed her shoes in order to tread noiselessly. Her hair hung down on one side of her face, and was carelessly tucked up with a comb on the other. All this I saw by the starlight, my eyes being accustomed to the dimness. And as Clementina sat down, and, leaning her arm on the window-sill, looked up at the sky, I was struck by something graceful in the outline of her face and figure which I had never noticed there before.

"Oh, Clemmy," said I, impulsively, "why don't you always wear your hair loose? You look so much better."

"What, like this?"

"No, not exactly in that disheveled fashion; but less tight and formal than you usually put it up. You have quite pretty hair. I never knew it before."

"We never wear our hair loose. We don't think it looks proper," answered poor Clemmy, with a half-doubtful shake of the head.

That "we" appeared to her to be a tower of strength.

"Well," said I, "what brought you here at this hour, Clementina?"

"Do I disturb you?"

"No; as you see, I was not thinking of going to bed yet a while."

After a good deal of hesitation, and in the peculiar phraseology of the family, which by this time I had learned to comprehend very fairly, Clemmy at length confided to me that she had a suitor whom she "liked very well" (in non-Cudberry English, was very fond of), and who wished to ask her parents' permission to marry her. But she had always hitherto dissuaded him, on one pretext or another, from speaking to her father. And now the suitor was getting out of patience, and poor Clemmy

did not know what to do, and had come to me for advice.

"But, good gracious, Clementina, if you like him, and are willing to marry him, why should you not let him speak to your father?" I exclaimed.

She was silent.

"Is he very poor, or is there any thing in his circumstances which would be likely to make Uncle Cudberry refuse his consent?"

"Oh no! He's—if you'll promise not to tell again without my leave, I'll tell you who it is. It's Mrs. Hodgekinson's son."

So far as I knew, there could be no possible objection to this young man. He was an only son, and his parents were rich farmers, who were much respected in the county.

"Why, Clemmy," I cried, giving her a kiss, "I congratulate you! It seems to me to be a most suitable match in every way."

It was curious to see Clemmy's newly awakened feelings struggling with the habitual stiffness and hardness of the family manner. She first drew back quite abruptly from my proffered caress, and then returned my kiss timidly, and said, "Oh, thank you, Anne!"

"I remember that—that young Mr. Hodgekinson." I had been on the point of calling him "Mrs. Hodgekinson's son," from the sheer force of example. "I remember that he seemed very gentle and good-tempered."

"Yes; he's very good-tempered."

"And well-looking, I think?"

"I—we all think him quite nice-looking," said Clementina, demurely.

"And his parents are on friendly terms with yours, and you are neighbors; and, upon my word, it seems to me that you could not have made a better choice!"

"Oh, but—"

"But what?"

"Why, they thought—we thought—or at least *she* thought—that he was going to propose to Tilly."

Then it all came out. William Hodgekinson's visits to Woolling had been interpreted by the whole family as having for their object to pay court to "Miss Cudberry." Miss Cudberry came first; that was the rule of the family. Any marrying or givings in marriage which might take place among the Cudberrys ought, in right and justice and propriety, to commence with Miss Cudberry, and the rest might follow in due succession. But perversely to select the youngest of the three sisters, and to pass by the prior claims of the two elder ones, was a high crime and misdemeanor, whose enormity weighed poor Clemmy down, and made her tremble at the prospect of revealing the proposal that had been made to her.

I consoled her and reassured her as well as I could. "Your lover"—Clemmy nearly jumped off her chair at the word—"did not deceive Tilly by paying her any marked attention, did he?"

"Oh no! At least— The fact is, he is

afraid of Tilly—awfully afraid of her! But then, of course, you know, we all thought—at least they all thought—naturally, that she was the object of William's coming—Miss Cudberry, you know!"

"Well, well, my dear Clemmy, that can't be helped," I rejoined, rather impatiently. "They were all mistaken, and nobody can be blamed. People don't fall in love by the table of precedence, and I am sure it would be very unreasonable to expect that they should."

In my own mind I had little doubt that Uncle Cudberry would look on the proposed alliance very favorably, and would in no wise resent the fact that it was his youngest, and not his eldest daughter, who was thus sought in marriage; and I tried to convince Clemmy of this, and to point out to her, as delicately as I could, that if she had her father on her side she need not fear any other member of the family.

But Clemmy was in mortal terror of her father; and before she left me she had gained from me a promise, which I suppose was the main object of her coming to me, that I would take upon myself the task of breaking this mighty matter to Uncle Cudberry the next morning.

CHAPTER XLVII.

I EASILY found an opportunity of performing my embassy to Uncle Cudberry. I found him a little after noon in the old barn wherein our memorable interview had taken place last year. He had been tramping over the farm in the hot sunshine, and had withdrawn into the cool shelter of the barn's thick walls to enjoy his lunch, which consisted of bread and cheese and home-brewed beer in a flat stone bottle.

His first words, after silently and attentively listening to what I had to say, rather took me aback.

"The chap don't expect any thing *down* wi' Clemmy, does he?"

"A—a—any thing down? I don't know."

"Ah, but *I* must know; because I never meant to give none on 'em any thing but their clothes until after I was dead. One hundred pounds to buy the trussou"—thus Uncle Cudberry pronounced *trousseau*—"is all she'll get in *my* lifetime."

I was rather surprised at the liberality of this provision for the wedding-clothes. But Uncle Cudberry proceeded to explain, and, as it were, to apologize for it. A hundred pounds was a large sum, truly—a very large sum. But he calculated that his daughters cost him a considerable sum per annum, and he was bound in fairness to remember that the husbands who married them would in future take all that expense on their own shoulders. "It is but the one outlay, you see," said Uncle Cudberry; "and I don't choose that a Miss Cudberry of Woolling should go shabby into any man's house."

He was very reticent, as usual, but I gath-

ered on the whole from his words and demeanor that, as I had anticipated, he would be very willing to allow Clementina to become Mrs. William Hodgekinson.

"There'll be a devil of a bobbery with Miss Cudberry!" said he, with a momentary spark of expression in his black eye, just before we parted.

I was silent, being puzzled how to reply to this unexpected admission; and, after pausing a second or two, he resumed, still more to my surprise:

"And, mind you, *I* don't say Miss Cudberry will be altogether wrong. She comes first in the family. There's no doubt about that. But, as I said to 'em t'other day, there don't seem to be much chance of finding husbands for the girls, or a wife for Sam. Sam's a lout, it's true. But Miss Cudberry— Well, can't be helped. It's high time as I got rid of *some* on 'em."

I communicated the result of my interview to Clementina, and, although she agreed with me that it was good, it threw her into a very nervous state, which was not diminished by hearing later in the afternoon that her father had mounted his horse and ridden over to Farmer Hodgekinson's.

Poor Clemmy's trepidation exhibited itself not in any soft, trembling, subdued gentleness of manner which called for encouragement and sympathy, but after a characteristic Cudberry fashion—she became, that is to say, exceedingly rigid, brusque, and almost snappish. And as in her anxiety she clung to me and followed me every where, I had not altogether a pleasant time of it.

But at length Uncle Cudberry returned. And he did not return alone. The suitor had ridden back with him, and when from the garden we (Clemmy and I) beheld two horses trotting along the pathway, instead of one, I squeezed Clemmy's hand, and bade her be of good cheer, for it was plain that the course of her true love was destined to run smooth.

I reckoned a little too rashly, however, when I talked of *smoothness*, as will presently appear.

Clementina ran into the house and up to her own room; perhaps to recover her composure in solitude, perhaps to add some touch of adornment to her dress. And Mr. Cudberry, followed by his young guest, who looked remarkably sheepish, walked solemnly into the drawing-room.

It was tenanted only by Aunt Cudberry and Henrietta—the former writing crooked entries in her housekeeping-book, the latter playing the piano in a manner which always suggested to me that she must be *hurting* the instrument. I entered the room almost at the same instant with Mr. Cudberry and his guest.

"Mrs. Cudberry," said my uncle, walking up to his wife, "allow me to present to you your future son-in-law."

Aunt Cudberry let her pen fall from her fingers, and Henny ceased her relentless perform-

ance with a crash. As to the future son-in-law, thus presented, he was in an agony of bashfulness, and of a glowing red color even to the tips of his ears. But none of these things disconcerted Mr. Cudberry.

"I've been over to Hodgekinson's and settled it all with him—or, at least, with Mrs. Hodgekinson. Her husband wasn't at home. But it's quite the same. He knows all about it," said Mr. Cudberry, sitting down and wiping his head with his handkerchief.

"Oh my! La, well now, my dear! and so you really mean it, poor thing?" said Aunt Cudberry, putting one of her hands on each of the young man's shoulders, and giving him a queer little shake as she looked earnestly into his face. This proceeding appeared to act on William Hodgekinson in the manner of a homeopathic remedy for bashfulness. Certainly it would, under ordinary circumstances, have put him frightfully out of countenance, but in his present condition it seemed to give him a desperate kind of strength. For he jerked himself resolutely away from the good lady's hold, and answered in quite a loud voice, albeit with a purple-blushing visage:

"Yes, ma'am, I do mean it. I always have meant it, and I hope it 'll meet with your approbation—and the other young ladies' approbation," he added, after a second's pause.

"La, yes, my dear, if Mr. Cudberry is satisfied, and Miss Cudberry, I'm sure I dare say it will all do very well. It's a very serious thing being married; but, of course, you must both make up your minds to it, poor things."

All this time Henrietta had fixed her intended brother-in-law with a watchful and suspicious stare. Now she rose, and, advancing to the door, said:

"I'll call Tilly. She's in her own room."

"Stop a bit!" exclaimed Mr. Cudberry. "Just you understand clearly, and make Tilly understand clearly, who it is as is proposed for. Mr. William Hodgekinson has got my consent to marry my daughter Clementina."

"If I didn't think so!" exclaimed Henrietta, clapping her hands together with a noise like the report of a pistol. "I do declare I suspected it all along—there!"

"No! Never! Marry Clementina!" cried Aunt Cudberry, quite tremblingly. "Why, Samuel, what in the world—why, we all thought it was Tilly! La, there, my dears, whatever *will* Miss Cudberry say when she comes to know it?"

"Sh-h-h! Tut! What 'll Miss Cudberry say? She'll offer her best wishes, I suppose. Mr. William Hodgekinson don't fancy as Miss Cudberrys of Woolling are pulling caps for him. But your foolish chat, Mrs. Cudberry, is enough to turn his head wi' conceit."

So spake Uncle Cudberry, but it was of no avail. His wife could not take the hint to sustain the dignity of the absent Tilly. She continued to assure her husband and the young man alternately that they had all thought the

visits of the latter had had "Miss Cudberry" for their chief object, and to evince much agitation and anxiety as to the result of the news upon that injured young lady.

Young Hodgekinson looked about him with a bewildered and almost frightened air. I sincerely pitied him; but it was impossible not to be keenly alive to the intense absurdity of his position.

Mr. Cudberry had apparently abandoned him to his fate, and had retired behind his newspaper with an air of stolid determination, as who should say, "Fight it out, good people. I've done *my* part of the business."

I advanced to Mr. William, and held out my hand, and offered my congratulations.

"Thank you, miss," said he, giving my fingers a grip which made them tingle again.

"I think you will have a very good wife, Mr. Hodgekinson. Clemmy is a kind-hearted girl, and I hope you will be very happy."

"Thank you again, miss. I—I—desire to give satisfaction to all parties. But, you know, it's *impossible* to marry three young ladies. You must pick and choose. And Clemmy—well, of course, you know, when you're attached to a girl, and all that, you know, why, you're naturally wishful to be on good terms with her family. But I do assure you, miss, most solemn, that I never had the least idea of making up to Miss Cudberry—never in this world, Miss Furness! I'd take my oath of it to-morrow, if *that* would make things pleasanter."

I assured him that I did not believe that would make things pleasanter; and, moreover, that I had no doubt any little misunderstanding which might have arisen would speedily be cleared away. But I had to bite my lips diligently to repress a smile.

"Well, I do think it's too bad for a fellow to be accused of such a thing," pursued the young gentleman, lowering his voice and speaking confidentially, as to a sympathizing listener. "Miss Cudberry! Why, Lord bless you, Miss Furness! my mother would be fit to eat me without salt if I'd have thought of such a thing as bringing her Miss Cudberry for a daughter-in-law. Not but what she's a most excellent young lady, I'm sure," he added, apparently remembering on a sudden that he was speaking to a member of the family. "And I should think she'd make a most excellent wife for—for almost any body else," said Mr. Hodgekinson, waving his hand in a vague manner, as though generously bestowing Miss Cudberry as a matrimonial treasure on some one or other of his friends. "I've no doubt that there are some who would be quite—quite delighted to marry Miss Cudberry. But as for me—Do you think she'll—she'll blow up at all, Miss Furness? I hope you'll stand by me and Clemmy."

At this moment the three sisters entered the room—Henny, who had gone to summon her elder sister, Tilly, and Clemmy—the latter arriving from her own room.

There was an awful pause, during which Clementina edged up near to her father, Henrietta seated herself, with a half-pleased, half-spiteful expression of countenance, ready to throw in a barbed word or two at need, and "Miss Cudberry" stood bolt upright, opposite to young Hodgekinson, and fixed him with a terrible glare from her eyes.

At length she spoke; but it was a peculiar and unexpected feature in her speech that she addressed her parents exclusively, and spoke only *at* William Hodgekinson—never, however, releasing him from the power of her eye.

"Well, pa and ma, I should be glad to know if I have heard rightly, and whether the news about Mrs. Hodgekinson's son having proposed to my youngest sister, Clementina Cudberry, is correct."

Silence. An uneasy and furtive interchange of glances between Clemmy and her lover. Mrs. Cudberry moves her mouth and forehead spasmodically. Mr. Cudberry remains immovable behind his newspaper.

"I have always supposed, ma, that Miss Cudberry—*Miss* Cudberry—was somewhat of a feature in her own family. You know very well, pa, that that has been our rule. Miss Cudberry first and foremost. But now it appears, pa *and* ma, that she can't get an answer to a simple question."

"Put your question plain, my lass. Has William Hodgekinson proposed for Clemmy? Yes; he has. There—*that's* settled," said Mr. Cudberry, dryly.

"Thank you, pa. But it is not quite settled. I say nothing about unsuitability of birth, because this is a leveling age; and, as I have often told you, pa and ma, we must move with the times. And as to comparing a Hodgekinson with a Cudberry of Woolling, that, of course, is out of the question. But I have one or two observations to make, pa and ma, respecting Mrs. Hodgekinson's son on other grounds. Mrs. Hodgekinson's son has been received in this family on false pretenses. That is to say, *he* made the false pretenses. He came to Woolling very frequently; and what was his object in coming would any body in their senses have supposed? Why, Miss Cudberry! To whom did Mrs. Hodgekinson's son pay *marked* attention? To Miss Cudberry! With whom did Mrs. Hodgekinson's son walk and talk chiefly? With Miss Cudberry!"

Here William Hodgekinson muttered, audibly, "Because you made me;" and I perceived a gloomy defiance gathering on his brow.

"Let Mrs. Hodgekinson's son understand me, pa. Don't let him run away with absurd and unfounded notions, ma! I simply regarded him with pity, for an alliance between Miss Cudberry of Woolling and Mrs. Hodgekinson's son could never have been contemplated for an instant—"

"Certainly not!" put in the young man, more emphatically than politely.

"*By the former!*" pursued Tilly, ignoring the

interruption. "There is a fitness in things, and that which might suit Clementina's views would, of course, not do for her eldest sister."

"La, there, my dear, I'm very glad you take it so well!" exclaimed Mrs. Cudberry, with curious infelicity.

"But what I would have *you* consider, pa, is, whether you are justified in bestowing any one of your daughters—even Clemmy, poor thing!—on Mrs. Hodgekinson's son. Low birth, an unprepossessing exterior, a total absence of style, a mother-in-law of overbearing temper and presumptuous manners, *may* be got over," said Tilly, with extraordinary glibness, as though she were repeating a lesson learned by heart, and in a voice of ever-increasing shrillness. "But sneaking duplicity and false pretenses—deliberate deception offered to Miss Cudberry of Woolling in her own home—I should think these formed an insuperable barrier between Clementina and Mrs. Hodgekinson's son."

"Oh, Tilly, don't say that!" said Clementina, half crying.

Young Hodgekinson, apparently impelled by his lady-love's distress to make a stand, began to reply to Tilly's tirade. It was curious to me to see how, when made thoroughly indignant, the timid, awkward young man, who had been kept overlong in the maternal leading-strings, displayed a rough, rustic, brute force; and how feeble Tilly's feminine shrewishness showed beside him.

"Come, Miss Tilly," said he, "I think that's about enough. You never meant to have me, and, Lord knows, I never meant to have you; so we're both of one mind. And as your father's content, and Clemmy's content, I can do without your approbation. Come, Clementina, we'll go and have a bit of a walk together. Get your hat on. I rode over to have a talk with you, and I don't mean to go back without it."

At this bold assumption of authority over Clemmy the whole family remained in dumb consternation. Even Henny forgot to say any thing sharp on the occasion. Clemmy, after a timid look at her father, who nodded encouragingly, followed her betrothed out of the drawing-room, and we presently saw them stroll arm in arm past the window.

"Well!" exclaimed Tilly, recovering herself after a short pause, "that's a specimen of the treatment she has to expect. Poor Clemmy! Between Mrs. Hodgekinson's son and Mrs. Hodgekinson herself, she will be trampled in the mire completely. I *compassionate* her, but I wash my hands of the whole business, and must decline to interfere further."

And this was the position which Miss Cudberry maintained during the whole of her sister's courtship.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE old room with the sloping floor was very much tenanted by me during the following two or three days. There were bickerings among the girls on the subject of Clementina's engagement which were very disagreeable to witness. As a member of the family, they did not think it worth while to put on an appearance of union and good-will before me, and I took refuge in my chamber as often as I could.

One evening at sunset I wandered out alone into the lane behind Woolling. It was very unfrequented, as it led merely to the cottage of one of Mr. Cudberry's tenants. The hedge-rows were now in full leaf, the lane was grass-grown, and a couple of sheep with their lambs were grazing there.

I had left the family party at Woolling solemnly assembled in the drawing-room entertaining Mrs. Hodgekinson, who had come to take tea there, and to ratify, as it were, the young people's engagement by her presence. There had been sundry passages of arms already between that severe matron and Tilly Cudberry. Tilly had assumed a light and airy superiority of demeanor. She was gay, hilarious, tolerant, condescending. She gently pitied her sister, and smiled, more in compassion than scorn, at William Hodgekinson's wooing. Mrs. Hodgekinson's watchful eye was stern, and her mouth never once relaxed in its implacable tightness. Tilly might as well have tried to put the big iron knocker on Sir Peter Bunny's hall door out of countenance by her fine airs and contemptuous badinage as Mrs. Hodgekinson. But the good lady perfectly comprehended that Miss Cudberry was endeavoring to assume a superiority over herself and her son, and to convey by her manner that she considered Clementina (in so far as she was a Cudberry of Woolling) to be a pearl cast to underserving and unappreciating brutes, for whom acorns would be more than good enough.

And the result of this perception on the part of Mrs. Hodgekinson was to cause, in polite phrase, very considerable *tension* in the intercourse of the whole assembled company.

It was soothing to walk forth into the sweet, still air and the slanting, yellow sunshine. I went on to the point where the little grassy lane opened into another road—itself scarcely more than a lane—that led to the highway from Brookfield. By faint degrees the clattering of a horse's hoofs grew distinct out of the distance. A horseman came slowly along the road, and drew rein at the point where my grass-grown lane intersected it, turning in his saddle to look at me as I stood in the long evening shadow cast by a group of trees. The horseman was Donald.

I don't pretend to account for the positive certainty that it was he which possessed me from the first moment that I heard the sound of his horse's hoofs; but I record the fact that I had that positive certainty.

He threw himself out of the saddle and came toward me, leading his horse by the bridle.

"Oh, Anne! I am very fortunate in finding you thus," he said, very eagerly. But he bowed with undue politeness, and barely touched the hand I offered him.

"What made you come this way? I did not know you were acquainted with it."

"Not at all acquainted with it, for I nearly lost myself. I had been at Diggleton's End, and was told that I could reach Woolling by this route. But it is a labyrinth of lanes. However, fortune favored me, for here you are."

"Did you want to see *me*?" I asked, and the next moment I felt my face burn at the stupid *naïveté* which had communicated a tone of extreme surprise to my voice, for I thought it might be mistaken for affectation.

"Yes; I wish to say a few words to you if you will allow me. Can you remain here? I will not detain you long."

I bowed my head in silence, and we began to pace slowly along side by side. Donald had let go the bridle, and his horse put down his nose to nibble at the fresh, soft grass.

"He follows me like a dog when I call him," said Donald. "He won't stray."

There was a little pause. I heard the horse's teeth cut the herbage, and the twittering of birds preparing for sleep in the foliage.

"I was more grieved than I can say, Anne," said Donald, "when I accidentally discovered that it was my presence which had driven you from Mortlands. I had accepted the statement that you needed change of air as being a natural and simple explanation of your going. I had—to make a clean breast of it—I *had* perceived that my presence in your grandfather's house was not pleasing to you. But I little thought it was so utterly intolerable that you were driven away by it altogether."

I could not utter the protest that made my heart swell. I was dumb; and suppressed tears seemed to suffocate me.

He went on, after waiting an instant, as though expecting me to speak:

"Perhaps I ought not to have come to Mortlands so long as you were an inmate of it. If I had consulted only my own peace of mind I should not have done so. However, it is useless to enter into all that. I came. Only this morning, in a long conversation with Dr. Hewson, I learned the real cause of your running away from Mortlands. And I lost as little time as possible in coming to beg you to return, and to tell you that I leave your grandfather's house to-night."

I struggled to speak; but still the rising tears almost choked me. Words and thoughts came thronging into my mind, but my tongue weakly refused to utter them.

He did not see; he could not understand.

"I fear that even my coming now is displeasing to you," he said. "You don't deign to say a word to me, Anne. Well—I meant for the best. Forgive me if I have been wrong.

It was an error of judgment, and no willful disregard of your wishes, that brought me here. And believe me, Anne, that however you may treat me, I am able to do justice to all that is good in you. I have seen your unselfish devotion to your mother, your patient endurance of misfortune, your courage, and your good sense. I have heard your grandfather bless you with tears in his eyes. It is not for me to keep you away from those to whom you are so dear and so useful. Won't you say 'Good-by?'"

Then I broke down and burst into tears. I sobbed so violently, although not noisily, that Donald was startled out of the sad, cold manner—a manner full of half-frozen kindness—which he had hitherto displayed during this interview.

"Anne! Anne! For Heaven's sake don't cry so! What is the matter? What have I done? Won't you say one word to me, Anne?"

I made a sign with my hand that he should wait and give me time. He did so, but in great distress and impatience, twisting his riding-whip like a thread in his fingers, and with a face of extreme anxiety.

At length I found voice to speak.

"You say that you learned from my grandfather this morning the real cause of my leaving Mortlands. You have *not* learned it. It seems—incredible as it appears to my mind, I must believe you; I can not doubt your word—it seems that you have not even guessed the real cause of my going away. Surely my grandfather did not tell you that I left Mortlands because your presence was hateful to me? And yet that is the cause you choose to assign."

"No; he did not say so in plain words, but I clearly gathered that it was so from what he let fall."

"And you can not imagine any other feeling—any other reason which should make it very painful to me to continue living as we were living at Mortlands?"

"You speak with a bitter tone, Anne. There may have been—no doubt there was—pain to you in many reminiscences conjured up by my presence; but, pardon me, if I say that if I could endure to see and speak with you daily, it seemed natural to suppose that you might endure it also."

"Oh!" I cried, wringing my hands, "it is useless; you can not or will not understand. But—I *will* speak. It is not just and right dumbly to endure unmerited contempt. Yes, contempt. That, and nothing less, was what your manner expressed for me. I will tell you, Donald, the reason why I could not bear to stay under the same roof with you. It was because you met me day after day with a stern face, with an icy bow, with some formal, conventional word of greeting. You were like your old self to every one but me. To me you were cruel in your coldness. If I gave you pain once, was it manly, or generous, or even

just, to punish me for it so inexorably? I, too, have suffered, Donald. The pain I caused you was caused by no wrong-doing on my part. I never ceased to feel toward you as affectionately as when we were children together. Of course if I cared nothing—if the memory of the old days were as completely indifferent to me as it seems to be to you—you would have no power to make me suffer. I should meet disdain with disdain. But I will not fear to be sincere, and to tell you the truth. You have treated me hardly, Donald, and I have never merited such treatment at your hands."

His face changed as I spoke from anxiety to surprise, and from surprise to an expression I could not interpret; but it seemed to have a ray of joy in it. When I ceased to speak I turned to go away. It seemed to me that I could not bear to remain in his presence another moment. But he caught my hand and held it, crying, "Stay, Anne, one moment."

"Why? What is there to be said that it will be good to say? I had better go."

"There are many things to be said. One thing is—forgive me! Oh, Anne, I never thought of hurting you, or being cruel. I little dreamed that you cared for any thing I could say or do. I was miserable, and—jealous."

"Jealous!"

"You know I can be very jealous of affection. Partly it is because I do not expect to be greatly loved. I know my own shortcomings. I have never been winning or popular. So much the more precious to me is love and kindness, so much the more wretched does the loss of them make me!"

I looked at him in bewilderment. "I do not understand you," I said. "Of what or of whom were you jealous? Of Mrs. Abram? of little Jane? There was no one else to claim my regard except my own dear ones."

"Do not mock at me, Anne. Don't curve that scornful lip! It is very serious to me; more serious than any thing else on earth. No; I was not jealous of Mrs. Abram or the child. I was jealous of the absent—of the love you had given that I could not win; and all the more heart-sore because I believed that love to be unworthily bestowed."

I felt the hot blood rush up into my face; but I would speak no word to him on that score. There was a feeling within me which rendered it impossible for me to say, "You are mistaken; I bestowed no love unworthily. I do not love that absent person; he never had my heart." I could have died rather than say this to Donald.

"This morning," he went on, "Dr. Hewson told me that there was no engagement to bind you to that man. I was thankful to hear it, God knows, for *your* sake."

"Why did my grandfather volunteer such a confidence?" I said, coldly; "it was surely uncalled for." My heart was beating very fast, and the blood had left my face.

"How terribly proud you are, Anne!" said

Donald, looking at me wistfully. "Be at rest; Dr. Hewson did not volunteer it. He told me the truth in answer to my question."

I was silent; and he also stood for some minutes without speaking.

"You do not love that man now, Anne?" said Donald at length, in a low, hesitating voice.

"I shall say no more to you; you have no right to question me. You *had* a right, as my playmate and beloved friend and almost brother; but now—you have chosen to put a barrier between us. I can not be set down and taken up at your caprice, Donald; and it is not an evil pride that makes me say so; indeed it is not. I *can not* talk to you in the old trustful way while I know that the old trustful feeling is dead between us. It would be too hollow and false and painful."

"Anne, don't you *know* that I love you with all my heart and soul?"

I leaned my arms upon a gate that led into the Woolling meadows to steady myself. I felt the ground waving beneath my feet. I could only gasp out his name, "Donald!" My face must have changed greatly, for he put out his arm to support me, as though fearing I should fall; but I held by the gate with one hand and waved him off with the other.

"Don't you know that I have never ceased to love you?—that all my cold reserve and seeming ill-humor was to hide my heart, or rather to defend it? But I *knew* in my conscience that that was hopeless. I tried to deceive myself. I told myself that I was coming to Mortlands merely because it was my duty to my father's dear old friend to come; but all the while I was trembling with the hope of seeing you. The rustle of your gown as you moved across the room, the sound of your voice, the touch of your hand, made my heart leap in my breast. And you seemed so placid, so sweet. You gave me your hand, and smiled on me with your pale face as though all the past had been but a dream—as though— Oh, I can not express it, Anne! but I suffered tortures of jealousy and longing, and self-reproach and doubt. And then when this morning your grandfather said there was no engagement between you and that man; that, so far as he knew, there never had been any; and when I learned, or thought I learned, that you had left Mortlands to avoid me—I resolved to see you, making the excuse to myself that I had no right to keep you away from your home among uncongenial people, but with an insane kind of hope urging me on. Anne, if you will tell me that you never loved Gervase Lacer, tell it me with your own lips, and look at me with your true eyes, I will believe you against any thing to the contrary—against the evidence of my senses. You asked me what right I had to question you. I have told you—the right a man has who loves and honors a woman above all the world. Don't be obdurate, Anne; I will trust you from my soul."

There was a momentary struggle within me

—such a struggle as I have undergone when a child—between the sincere impulse of my heart and a sort of leaden immobility—a kind of dumb demon which seemed to seal my lips and chain my limbs. But I shook it off, and stretching out my arms to Donald, fell upon his breast, and cried there as a little child might cry who has been lost and nearly frozen in the bleak world, and thaws into delicious tears at the soft warmth of home.

“I never loved him, Donald. I was foolish, and perhaps wrong in some points. But for loving—I never loved but you, and I have loved you always.”

CHAPTER XLIX.

My aunt and cousins were a good deal surprised at my announcement, when I returned to the house, that I must go back to Mortlands the next day. Why must I go? What was the matter? How flushed my face was! How my eyes glittered! Aunt Cudberry hoped I was not sickening for typhus fever, or small-pox, or any other terrible disease. But she didn't like the look of me at all, poor thing!

I assured her that I felt quite well. But I persisted in my intention of returning to Mortlands, giving as a reason that I wished to see my mother and grandfather, and speak to them on a matter of importance to me.

“Is that young man at your grandfather's still, my dear?” asked Aunt Cudberry.

I was startled by the singular patness of the question. But it proved to be but a random shot on the dear old lady's part; for she proceeded, when I had answered her in the affirmative: “Ah, well, that's a bad job, my dear—now, isn't it? For if you *should* have a fever or any thing, it's a great trial to have a man in the house. They creak so, don't they, my dear? I mean their boots, poor things!”

Mrs. Hodgekinson here came to my rescue, declaring grimly that she thought I looked well enough. *She* could see nothing the matter with me. In fact, I had a little more life and color in my face than usual. She supposed it was the country fare. There was a deal in feeding—more than people thought.

I could not but remember Mrs. Hodgekinson's dictum on the night of the ball, that it was best for every body “to stay in their own houses, and eat what they'd got.” However, this stern dame was gracious to me after her fashion. And I suppose I owed this graciousness to her son William's good report of me.

Mr. Cudberry took me aside the next morning to ask me if I had been vexed or offended in any way, that I had made up my mind to leave Woolling so suddenly. “I won't have it, mind you, Anne,” said he, slowly and doggedly. “If any thing has gone cross with you I'll put it straight, if you will but say the word. Miss Cudberry has been ruffled a good deal by all

this business of Clemmy's, and maybe she's making herself onpleasant to you to ease her mind. Because, you see, women *are* like that, when they're put out. You kick them, and they'll kick the cat. But I'm master, and I mean to have my way. And if you give me the word, I'll take care you sha'n't be bothered underneath my roof.”

I assured him that I was neither vexed nor offended, nor badly treated in any way; that I thanked him and all his family for their hospitality, and that I had spent a peaceful week at Woolling, which I should be glad to remember.

“Well, now I have a good stare at you,” said Mr. Cudberry, suiting the action to the word, “I do say as you're looking a sight better than you did when you came. Why, it's quite remarkable! There's a difference from one day to another. Hang me if you was looking so bright and so bonny four-and-twenty hours ago! Well, I always knew Woolling air was the finest in England. Look at me! I haven't slept out of it one night for forty years; and though I'm not exactly ‘bright and bonny,’ to be sure, yet I'm as tough as a bit of yew.”

“Anne Furness!” said Tilly, very solemnly to me, just as I was about to step into the scialable, “I have a request to make of you.”

“What can I do for you, Tilly?”

“*Will* you invite me to spend a day or two at Mortlands early next week?”

“Oh!—I—I'm sure grandfather will be very glad to see you. I will speak to him. You know I can not invite people to his house without his leave. But I am afraid you will find Mortlands but a dull place.”

“No matter for that, Anne. Of course I can not expect to find a Woolling every where. I shall visit one or two families of distinction in Horsingham, and shall be glad of the change.”

It was not a very pleasant prospect to me to have Tilly Cudberry depending on me for companionship and entertainment during some days. But it could not damp my spirits. A more serious trouble would scarcely have done so. As I drove along the leafy lanes my heart was light, and my eyes damp with delicious tears. He loved me! Donald loved me! At times I trembled to think how nearly I had lost him!—how near we had been to parting forever, and what a seeming chance had cleared away our mutual misunderstanding! Then I recalled all his words, his looks, the tones of his voice; the grave, outlooking candor in his eyes, such as we see sometimes in the self-unconscious eyes of a little child; the ringing, eager sound of his voice, which had never lost its boyish frankness; the strong, simple earnestness of manner (not always appreciated by slight, poor natures), which arose from his habitually giving others credit for being as absolutely sincere as himself. And withal—let the reader believe me or not—I saw his faults! I saw them, I believe, more clearly than I had ever seen them before. They were faults a woman who loved him might be sorry for, but never ashamed of.

He was oversensitive to any breath of coldness. He would meet no kindly advance half-way, although no one could more genuinely prize kindness. His humble judgment of himself was extreme enough to border on the other extreme of inflexible pride—as extremes will be apt to border on each other. He was trenchantly severe in his judgments, though never in his deeds. He could take few things lightly, and in some matters was as impetuously impatient as a school-boy. My affection cast no glamour over my judgment, I sincerely think. I thought him no miracle of perfection, no pattern of manly beauty. But I knew him then, as I know him now, to be a noble, generous, steadfast human being, whose love made me worthier in my own eyes, and whom I could love and honor with an entire and perfect trust.

He was waiting for me at the beginning of the long, elm-bordered meadow we called the Park. I stopped the sociable, and told Daniel he need come no further; I would walk the rest of the way to Mortlands, the day was so fine. And there was Mr. Ayrle; I could go home under his escort.

"And what 'll I do wi' the box, then?" asked Daniel, looking at me as stolidly as if he would not have been surprised at an order to set my little black trunk down by the road-side—as perhaps, indeed, he would not.

"Not to desire or admire, if a man could learn it, were more

Than to walk all day like the sultan of old in a garden of spice,"

sings Mr. Tennyson—or, rather, the hero of Mr. Tennyson's "Maud." Now I do believe that Daniel admired absolutely nothing, and desired very few things.

"Oh, dear me!" said I, clasping my hands, and coloring hotly, "I forgot all about the trunk." I felt terribly ashamed. Such *étourderie* was not frequent with me, and I thought that Daniel must observe it, and make sly mental comments on it. But it was conscience that made a coward of me. If Daniel had any latent faculty of wonder in him, it was not to be evoked by such trifles as a young lady's forgetfulness.

"Ah," said he, nodding his ruddy locks, "there's where it is. And if it hadn't ha' been for me you'd ha' gone on forgetting it."

"Couldn't you drive on to Mortlands, and leave the trunk with the servants there, and say that I am coming on foot, Daniel?"

"Yes," said Daniel, "I *could*."

"And will you, if you please? Be good enough to tell Keturah that I am walking, and shall be there soon after you, by the way through the Park."

"Yes, I will," said Daniel, after a little pause, as though he had been considering whether or no he should so far oblige me as to do what I told him.

"Take care of Miss Furness's property," said Donald, slipping a silver coin into Daniel's hand, "and get yourself a glass of beer in Horsingham."

"Yes, I will," answered Daniel, in precisely the same meditative tone as before; but he touched his hat and grinned, by way of thanks, before driving off.

Donald told me, as we walked arm in arm along the meadow pathway—how dear it was to me to lean on that strong arm, and to feel that I might safely rely on its protection for evermore!—that he had spoken to my grandfather last evening on returning to Mortlands, and that he had been most kind and cordial and affectionate.

"He was glad for my sake, I know, Donald," said I.

"He was glad, darling—and with reason—for mine."

"Well, we will let that rest for the present; I shall keep my own opinion, of course, by right of the privilege of my sex, let you say what you will. But tell me what you and grandfather said to each other."

"What! *all* that we said? That would be a long business. We sat talking in his study until past midnight."

"No. Don't be foolish. Not every word, of course. But—what did he say about mother?"

"He said he thought our news would make her happy, and that you had best break it to her yourself."

"Yes; that is what I wish. Dear mother! She was always very fond of you, Donald."

Then our talk wandered into reminiscences which were very sweet to us, but which would be only tedious to the reader. We spoke, too, of the future, as well as the past. Donald intended, if I approved the plan, to establish himself permanently as a physician in Horsingham. He had competence—almost wealth—secured to him by his father's will, but he did not like the idea of leading an idle life. He thought he might have the means of doing some good to his fellow-creatures by the practice of his profession. And unless I had any desire to leave that part of the country, he thought it would be well to stay in Horsingham, where our presence would cheer and comfort his dear old friend's declining days.

We talked and planned, and built castles in the air, and walked on as if through a delightful dream-world.

Before we reached Mortlands I paused and said:

"Dear Donald, there is one thing I wish to say to you. I was struck by your words last evening, when you declared that you would believe me if I told you I had never loved that misguided man—you would believe me, you said, even against the evidence of your senses. What did that mean, dear? I did not understand it."

He looked at me very gravely, and with the expression of one pondering on a perplexing theme; but there was no mistrust of me in his eyes.

"Dearest," he said at length, "I will tell you what it meant. I will have no secrets from you, my own one. But do not let us speak of

it to-day. Let a week go by, and then, if you will, ask me for an explanation. I shall also have some explanations to ask from you. But let them rest for the present. Let me prove to you how entire and unshakable is my confidence in you, my own dear wife! See, we are close at home!"

CHAPTER L.

WE were very happy that evening at Mortlands. Our hearts were full of peace and hope. Mother's eyes beamed tenderly whenever they lighted on Donald or on me. There were no tears in them. I had not seen her shed tears for many months. But there were still depths of unfathomable sorrow lying beneath the surface of those soft brown eyes—a sorrow too deep and settled for tears. All her passionate outbursts of grief had long since ceased; but grief had made itself a familiar home in her heart, and abode there silently. Still the news of my engagement to Donald had been very sweet and welcome to my dear mother. She kissed and blessed us both with tranquil affection.

"You know I always loved you, Donald," said she, passing her thin hand over his forehead. "I am as proud of you as if you were my own boy, and may be allowed to confess it. No one will accuse a mother-in-law of being unduly vain of and indulgent to her daughter's husband. So you will probably be dreadfully spoiled."

"Don't be afraid, dear Mrs. Furness. Being made much of is the best thing in the world for my constitution; it brings out all my good points, and none of my bad ones. The fonder folks are of me, the better I grow!" replied Donald, looking across at me with a grave countenance, which made grandfather laugh heartily.

Grandfather was the most outwardly joyous of us all, and quite astonished Mrs. Abram by his sallies of gayety. Poor Mrs. Abram offered us her congratulations with sincere affection, although in her own peculiar and low-spirited manner. It was some time before she appeared to be able thoroughly to seize upon and realize the idea of the new relations between Donald and myself. When at last she did so, she beckoned me aside, and asked me with an anxious face if she might venture to make one inquiry.

"Dear Mrs. Abram," said I, kissing her, "of course you may!"

"Well, then, my dear Anne, I should wish to know whether Donald—whether Mr. Ayr—"

"Mrs. Abram! you are not going to change Donald's old appellation at this special time? Of course you call him 'Donald!'"

"Well, then, my dear child, I am very anxious to know whether Donald means to take you away from your grandfather? I mean—of course in one sense he takes you away—but

I mean away from Horsingham? Because, although no one can be more aware of my mental deficiencies than I am myself, I *am* sure of one thing—it would nearly kill Dr. Hewson to lose you, Anne! I know him so well. It is very strange that I should, for of course I don't disguise from myself that my intellect is on most points very weak—painfully so at times. But whether it is my love and gratitude for your grandfather that makes me clear-sighted about him, or whether it is that I am specially permitted to overcome *his* confusions and temptations on this one point, I am quite certain that to part from you now would shorten your grandfather's days. And I hope—I do hope—that Donald and you will continue to remain with him, or to let him remain with you. That's all, Anne. I ask your pardon if I have said more than I ought. But it was, as it were, borne in upon me to say it," added the faithful creature, wiping her eyes and looking at me wistfully.

I reassured her, and calmed her affectionate solicitude, and presently she was quite at peace again, and nearer to wearing a cheerful aspect than I had ever seen her.

We had resolved to keep our engagement secret for the present. Our marriage was not to take place until the spring. Mother had signified that she wished one year of mourning to expire fully before there should be any white garments or wedding-feast at Mortlands; and in March nearly eighteen months would have elapsed since she had donned that widow's cap which she never more put off save on the one day of my wedding. In March, then, it was settled, with my mother's full approval, that I should become Donald's wife.

Meanwhile we did not wish our engagement to be publicly spoken of. The secrecy in which we desired it to remain for the present did not, of course, extend to the household at Mortlands. We could trust to the discretion of all its inmates. And Keturah took care triumphantly to remind her master that it was a family of "*womenfolk*" whom he thus implicitly credited with a power of holding their tongues!

Keturah's pride and delight in our news was boundless. I laughingly told Donald in her presence that I was sure Keturah did not consider me half good enough for him. "You always spoiled Mr. Donald, Keturah; you know you did!"

"Nay," said the old woman, looking at us both with her keen, sparkling black eyes, "I don't know as I spoiled him, Miss Anne; and if I did, it don't follow nohow as I don't reckon you good enough for him. If he was my own son, I shouldn't say as a vartuous young lady like you wasn't good enough for him. A woman trusts a deal and risks a deal when she gives herself up to her husband, and a man as *is* a man feels that well enough. Nay, nay, Mr. Donald don't want *me* to preach to him as he's getting a treasure. *He* believes firm enough as your price is far above rubies;

and, what's more, he'll believe it firmer still this day ten years—which is saying a deal for you both."

What joy it was to wander with Donald through the dear old garden, and recall our childish plays there, to discuss our plans for the future together, and to feel that I had a right to share his hopes and his cares and his thoughts for evermore! There was only one topic he never touched on in speaking to me during that evening and the following day—the topic, namely, of Gervase Lacer. And I waited, unwilling to be the first to break this reserve, but fully minded not to shrink from speaking freely and frankly whensoever it should please Donald to require me to do so. I also respected his request not to press him with questions as to the meaning of those words he had said to me about believing in me and trusting me, "even against the evidence of his senses." But I own that my thoughts often recurred to them with curiosity.

When we were all assembled at dinner on the day after my return to Mortlands I suddenly remembered Tilly Cudberry's parting words to me, and, with much contrition for my negligence, repeated them to grandfather.

"I have been thinking so much of other things," said I, "that the whole matter went out of my thoughts. Pray excuse my forgetfulness, dear grandfather."

"It is rather for Miss Cudberry to excuse it," returned grandfather. "And I don't know whether she is different from all other young ladies; but I think most girls would not be implacable toward you, under the circumstances, little Nancy."

"Well," said my mother, "I am inclined to think that Tilly Cudberry is different from all other young ladies. I have never met with one quite like her."

"But what is to be done about this—this invitation? What does she want to come here at all for?"

"I think she is not contented just now at home, and wishes for a change."

"Well, I—*suppose*," said grandfather, looking round upon us all slowly, "that I must ask her. Eh?"

"I'm almost afraid, dear grandfather, that, if she hears nothing to the contrary, she is capable of coming without being asked."

"The deuce she is!"

"But, of course, you can, if you like, send a note to Woolling saying that it is not convenient to you to receive her just now."

"No, no! Let her come. Her father has shown some glimmering appreciation of my little Nancy. And she is of poor George's kith and kin, after all. We mustn't forget that," said grandfather, in a lower voice, with a glance of ineffable tenderness at my mother. "And we are all very happy here, and our happiness ought to make us tolerant and kind to other people, so— Why, Judith! what's amiss?"

At the first mention of Tilly Cudberry's name poor Mrs. Abram's jaw had dropped, her knife and fork had ceased to ply, and she remained gazing straight before her in a sort of trance.

"Oh, I ask your pardon, Dr. Hewson," she said, humbly, and in her most muffled tones, "but I—I—was thinking of that young lady."

"What were you thinking of her? I didn't know that you had ever seen her."

"Yes, Dr. Hewson. She and her father, and her mother, and her two sisters, came here to see Anne while you and Lucy were away. I shouldn't have intruded, but Anne made me stay in the room."

"To be sure! Well, did Miss Cudberry make herself agreeable?"

"N—not very, I think, Dr. Hewson. But I am no judge of agreeableness, being, no doubt, far from agreeable to strangers myself. She had—a good deal to say, Dr. Hewson. But, to say the truth, I didn't very well understand her. And—and it did seem to me at times that there was something a little wild about her."

"A little wild, eh?" repeated grandfather, glancing at me in some bewilderment. "Well, Judith, if she does not please you, you've nothing to do but keep out of her way. I won't have you put out or troubled by any body—you know that very well. At the same time, my dear Judith," he added, with a certain good-humored, brusque air of authority, which he occasionally assumed toward his sister-in-law, "let me recommend you to shake off morbid fancies, to finish the beef you have on your plate as briskly as possible, and to let me send you some more."

"What is this nonsense about Tilly Cudberry that poor Judith has got in her head?" asked my grandfather as soon as he had an opportunity of speaking to me privately. I gave him as accurate an account of the scene that had passed as I could; and he listened in a sort of serio-comic surprise.

"God bless me!" he cried, pushing his hair—now white as snow—upright with his fingers. "She must be rather a severe infliction, this cast-iron cousin of yours, little Nancy. I hope poor Judith will remain in ignorance of the light in which the gentle Miss Cudberry regards her. I must take care to keep them apart as much as possible. Really I should almost be tempted to decline the honor of her visit. But it is too late. I sent off Havilah to Woolling with a note immediately after dinner. Heu! There's something unspeakably absurd in the notion of those two women mutually regarding each other as verging on lunacy!"

That same evening Miss Cudberry arrived. She walked into the long dining-room with a mighty flouncing and rustling of silk. She had attired herself with great splendor for the purpose of dazzling the humdrum inhabitants of Mortlands. And she had certainly succeeded in producing a startling effect.

There were in the dining-room when Tilly entered it only my grandfather, Donald, and myself. Mother and Mrs. Abram were sitting under a tree in the garden, and little Jane was with them. Tilly advanced to about the centre of the room, and thus spake:

"I have come from Woolling, Dr. Hewson, in our own sociable, with our own man-servant driving. Will you be so good as to allow our man-servant, Daniel, to put up our horse for an hour or two in your stable, and to return for him later? Our man-servant has a few commissions to perform for pa in the town. Pa considers him a faithful and trusted servant. Pa wouldn't on any account have allowed any of the other men-servants to drive me in this evening; for our horse is a very valuable and spirited creature, and requires to be driven with particular care. How do you do, Dr. Hewson? How do you do, Anne? Mr. Ayrlie, I presume; although you have never been presented to me, I dare say you have heard of Miss Cudberry of Woolling. How do you do?"

And then Tilly paused to take breath.

My grandfather was incapable of displaying any thing but the most delicate courtesy to a guest in his own house. But, to say truth, it was astonishingly difficult to be polite to Tilly: I despair of conveying to those who have never seen her *how* difficult it was. She would, at times, receive an attention, a mere simple civility, in a manner which affected sensitive persons like a sudden blow. As to Donald, he was so bewildered by Miss Cudberry's eloquence that he became as dumb and shy as a school-boy; and I could not help a fit of laughter, which must have appeared contemptibly silly in my cousin's eyes, when she confided to me, with the Cudberry candor, that she found "that young Ayrlie uncommonly dull."

We were in the room that she was to occupy, and Eliza was engaged in unpacking Miss Cudberry's dresses. Miss Cudberry herself was majestically seated on the side of the bed, glancing at her smart clothes with all the pride of proprietorship.

"Well, Anne," said she, "I don't see any thing to laugh at. I consider it *pitiable*. The young man has no more style than our head plowman. A mere lout! And what a coat! I should think it was cut in the year one!"

"Every body can't have such fashionable coats as Sam has, you know," said I, demurely.

"Well, I *don't* know, really. Why shouldn't he? His father left him well off, didn't he?"

"Oh yes; very well off."

"How much, now, should you say?"

"I can not tell exactly. But I know that Colonel Ayrlie was said to have amassed a handsome independence."

"Ah! Well, I shall endeavor to draw him out a little," said Tilly, after a pause of meditation, with her head on one side. "Poor young man, he has no chance of getting a little style among all you fogies; now has he? I dare say he finds it awfully dull here, for—you can't

mind my saying, my dear Anne, that you have grown quite a frump. Not, my dear child, that it's to be wondered at, all things considered! But it *must* be depressing for a young man; now mustn't it?"

In pursuance of her benevolent design of rousing Donald from the lethargy of boredom which she conceived was weighing on him, Tilly set to work, without losing any time, to favor him with a great deal of her conversation. We all walked out into the garden before tea, and there Miss Cudberry seized upon Donald, and talked to him with an incessant volubility and shrillness which nearly drove him distracted. I was so overcome by the absurdity of the scene—Tilly's undoubting self-complacency, and Donald's increasing gloom, which began to grow absolutely ferocious as he saw no chance of getting away from his tormentor—that I could but sit down on the garden seat exhausted with silent laughter.

Donald scolded me terribly afterward. He stole out from the tea-table and called me into the garden, where he began to reproach me for delivering him up to that "*dreadful* woman." We were within an ace of having a set quarrel about it, when fortunately we got a glimpse of the comic side of the matter, which, once beheld, could not be relinquished, and we ended by going off into peals of laughter one against the other, until the tears ran down our faces.

During the whole of her visit Tilly held more or less steadfastly to her intention of "drawing Donald out." But her time was not all devoted to that purpose. She announced on the first morning after her arrival that she had several visits to pay in Horsingham, and desired that a fly should be sent for, into which she mounted alone, her small person secreted within the voluminous flounces of a cheap, gaudy, silk gown, and her favorite pink hollyhocks trembling on her head. She told us at tea-time that she had been to see Lady Bunny. And when I half involuntarily expressed surprise at her having done so, she replied sharply that I showed great ignorance of the world in supposing that because Barbara Bunny would not marry her brother, she (Miss Cudberry of Woolling) was therefore bound to break with friends whose acquaintance was, to a certain extent, agreeable to her.

"Nay," said I, "Tilly, I should have had no such idea. But you all seemed so very angry against the Bunnys that I thought you would never have any thing to say to them again. To tell you the truth, I considered your anger very unreasonable all the time."

"I tell you what," she returned, with several very emphatic nods of the head, "I don't mean to sacrifice myself for the Cudberrys. The Cudberrys don't appear to have any intention of sacrificing themselves for *me*. I have hitherto identified myself, perhaps romantically, with the Cudberrys. But I sha'n't do so any more. Certain things have happened lately which con-

vince me that I had better look out for myself, as other people look out for *their* selves."

This was the first word I had ever heard from Tilly of disparagement of the "family" *en masse* (although she would rate each member of it separately with sufficient severity), the first hint she had ever given of an idea of separating herself from it in any way. In my mother's presence even Tilly put a little restraint on her boisterous volubility. But there were many afternoon hours which mother passed in her own room, and these Tilly took advantage of to entertain us with the gossip of Horsingham. It was a constant marvel to me how she had contrived to pick up the news she imparted to us.

In this way I learned that Matthew Kitchen had given a large sum of money for the erection of a brick building, to be called the Tabernacle, and used as a place of worship by the dissenting sect to which he belonged. Mr. Kitchen was quite an eminent man among them, and their preachers came from distant parts of England to receive the hospitality of his house, and to speak in his chapel. He was a very rich man for one in his station, and day by day was becoming richer. He had bought shares here and there, and had dabbled in the affairs of several companies even in London; withdrawing on each occasion at an advantageous moment, so as to suffer none of the troubles which ensued when the said companies, as generally happened, collapsed into inextricable ruin.

There was a talk of some extraordinarily valuable slate quarries having been discovered not far from Brookfield, and of a company being formed to work them, and of a "City man"—a mighty personage on the Stock Exchange—coming down to have a look at the place before drawing up a flourishing prospectus of the company. And Sir Peter Bunny *had* some vague idea of putting a little money into it if it looked promising. And thus Tilly rattled on with an abundance of detail, as if she had been in the innermost confidence of all the people she talked about.

CHAPTER LI.

At the end of a week I asked Donald to give me his promised explanation. The following day Tilly Cudberry was going out to tea with some recent acquaintance she had made in Horsingham—having shown lately a feverish anxiety to make new acquaintances—and Donald promised me that he would devote part of the afternoon to telling me what I wished to know.

"Why," said I, "is it so long a business, then?"

Yes, it would take some time, he told me, to enter into the matter as fully as he desired. I waited with a good deal of impatience for the appointed time, and busied my brain with a great many conjectures; none of which, however, came near the truth.

We had arranged to meet in the garden, but the afternoon proved rainy, and we could not go out. After dinner mother and Mrs. Abram left us as usual. Grandfather sat for a few minutes in his easy-chair, making notes in a memorandum-book. Donald and I seated ourselves near the window at the other end of the room, watching the dark, dropping clouds as they slowly passed above the summits of the leafy elms. Gradually the memorandum-book dropped from my grandfather's fingers, and he fell into a doze. He had latterly taken a habit of sleeping in his chair after dinner, and we lowered our voices so as not to disturb him.

"Anne," said Donald, "you must prepare for rather a long story. Do you remember hearing that I had gone away suddenly from your grandfather's house?"

"Remember it! How could I have forgotten it?"

"No; but I did not know whether the manner of my going had ever reached your ears. It was just about the time when your own great affliction must have swallowed up all lesser considerations."

"Nevertheless I did hear that you had gone away from Mortlands quite suddenly and secretly. Grandfather wrote us word. His letter came just *before*—"

He pressed my hand silently, and after a little pause began:

"I walked to Diggleton's End, and there, the night being threatening, and I fasting and weary, took refuge in the house of your father's old servant, Dodd."

"Where you were robbed that same night."

"You know that too? Did Dr. Hewson tell you?"

"He told me the bare fact as you had written it to him, but I had a fuller account of the matter from Dodd himself."

Then I repeated to Donald all that Dodd had told me.

"Well," said he, after hearing me out, "that abbreviates my story very greatly. Dodd saw that I was out of sorts, as he told you. But, of course, he did not guess how heart-sick and wretched I was; how miserable I was rendered by my jealous thoughts. During the day, when I was going about among Dr. Hewson's patients in Horsingham, I had heard gossiping allusions to your engagement to Ger-vase Lacer. Some approved, some disapproved it, but no one insinuated a doubt as to the fact. I think there can be no doubt that he industriously spread the report himself. It was all very bitter to me, and I resolved to go away without waiting for any leave-taking. I thought that once at a distance from Horsingham I should be calmer, and I *knew* that I could write to Dr. Hewson that which I had not self-command enough to say to him. I had not very long before received a remittance from my father's bankers in London. There remained of it something over fifty pounds, and I knew that that was more than sufficient for

my present purposes. I intended to go straight to town, and there determine on my future course of action. You have heard how I shared my supper with the stranger whom I found in possession of the inn parlor when I arrived. From the first glimpse of him he impressed me most unfavorably. There was something altogether extraordinary about the man's appearance and manner."

"Of course there must have been! Is it not evident that he was disguised? And I suppose you have no doubt that he was the thief who stole your money?"

"I have no doubt of that whatsoever."

"I suppose he was a 'professed' London thief, who had come to Horsingham to exercise his calling during the race week."

"H'm! Y—yes, I *suppose* so. But there was something about the fellow which puzzled me, and which still puzzles me, and which that hypothesis does not wholly account for."

"Well, Donald?"

"Well, my darling, we sat down to supper, and the man began to pour forth denunciations against the wickedness of races, and of those who bet on them, those who took part in them, and those who witnessed them. He talked in a queer, snuffling tone, interlarding his speech with the cut-and-dried cant phrases of an itinerant preacher of the lowest class. I was not in a mood to be communicative; I am always shy and reserved with strangers, and I particularly object to the irreverent arrogance of fellows of that kind. Which three causes combined to keep me very taciturn. But the stranger did not allow my manner to chill him. He ate very little. I, on the other hand, was in need of food; and as I ate my supper he talked and talked, rampant and unabashed. By-and-by he mentioned some names I knew."

"Our name, did he not?"

"Yours among others."

"You need not tell me what he said, dear. I can fancy too well what sort of text poor father's name would furnish to a man of the sort you describe."

"But, Anne— I promised to tell you the truth, but I find it a more irksome task than I had counted on."

"Donald! Don't mistrust me! What can hurt me so long as you hold my hand and look into my eyes confidingly? I *know* that you believe in my truth, and you must not doubt my belief in your believing!"

"My dearest, the man did not mention merely your father; he spoke, and at some length, of *you*!"

"Of *me*?"

"See, now! You blanch and quiver directly! All that woman's pride of yours is aroused at a touch!"

"No, dear Donald. Please to go on. I was only startled. I am sure I am acquainted with no such person as the man you speak of."

"He didn't profess to know you personally. He had heard of you, he said, from a sad rep-

robate—one whom he had tried to convert from his evil ways, having had some acquaintance with his father and mother—from Mr. Gervase Lacer, in short. 'But,' he said, 'reprobate as Lacer may be from a godly and righteous man's point of view, the young woman has not treated him very honorably. She has been playing fast and loose between him and another young man who has money expectations.' He went on to say, in the same canting and offensive manner, that he knew you to have been solemnly engaged to Lacer—that he had seen letters from you to him."

"Letters! Letters from me to Mr. Lacer?"

"And that it was only on discovering that fortune had turned the cold shoulder on him that you had turned him yours also. When I stopped him, abruptly enough, with the statement that I had the honor to be your friend and your parents' friend, and that I could not listen to utterly unfounded calumnies against those whom I respected, he took to his hypocritical mask of sanctimoniousness again, and spoke after the fashion of that brute Matthew Kitchen. He must bear witness! He had tried to snatch his young friend Lacer as a brand from the burning! I left him in the middle of a sentence, and walked out into the orchard."

"Donald, you did not give any credence to the fellow's statement? I won't insult you by even asking the question. I am *sure* you did not."

"Dear Anne, you must remember all the circumstances as they appeared to me at the time. I did not, of course, give an instant's thought to the accusation of mercenary and dishonorable conduct on your part. But I *did* feel confirmed in my belief that you had engaged yourself to Lacer. Think what it must have been to me to suppose you the promised wife of a man who was capable of speaking your name and discussing your conduct with such a one as this stranger!"

"You should never have believed it, Donald."

"It is true. And—I don't know whether I can make you understand me when I say that I never *did* thoroughly believe it. Never, with all my heart; that's just it, Anne. I believed with my head, but not with my heart. There was an obstinate, blind conviction in me that you *could* not have betrothed yourself to such a man. For, although he might have deceived you for a time, and to a certain extent, I could not conceive your keen sense and purity of mind being entirely baffled by any amount of hypocrisy on his part. And yet—and yet—what was I to think? I turned away from my instinctive conviction, fearing to be fooled into believing what I *wished* merely because I wished it. Well, after remaining for some time in the orchard, I came into the house just as a storm was beginning. It had been threatening for some hours. I went to my room at once, and to bed, where, in spite of my troubles, and in

spite of the thunder and the rain, I slept soundly—being, indeed, tired out. The next morning came the discovery of the robbery, just as you have heard it from Dodd. But what Dodd could not tell you was this. The oily scrap of paper which I found on the floor near my door, and on which it was evident the thief had wiped his fingers after oiling the lock, was a fragment of a letter in your handwriting.”

“In *my* handwriting? Impossible!”

“Nay, Anne, it is true. I knew your hand perfectly. Besides, there were a few words about your father—anxiety for him, and so forth.”

“But—I can not understand. How, in Heaven’s name, could it have come into that man’s possession?”

“I had my theory about *that* too. I believed that Lacer—the letter must have been addressed to Lacer—had given it to him. Later I fancied the vagabond might have stolen the letter. But it is a strange matter, look at it as we will. Here is the fragment. I carefully preserved it. Judge for yourself.”

He took from his pocket a torn piece of a letter, very oiled and greasy. The writing on it was mine. Impossible not to recognize it. And, moreover, I perceived in an instant that it *was* a portion of a letter I had written to Gervase Lacer—the letter of which I had spoken to my mother. I was stupefied. I turned the morsel of paper this way and that, as though I could elucidate the mystery by doing so! Donald looked at me thoughtfully. I glanced up at him once suddenly, as the reflection occurred to me how difficult it must have been for him to believe in me implicitly after seeing those torn lines. But there was no glimmer of distrust in his eyes. Had there been I should have felt repulsed, and my lips would have been unable to utter a word of explanation. Very unreasonably, I grant; for Donald might well have been excused for exhibiting some touch of suspicion—or, at least, of uneasiness. But he showed neither. This was the fragment of the letter:

“.....Can you devise no plan.....You do not know how dear, how precious.....Perhaps I ought not to write this; but I cling to any chance. Pray come and let me speak to you. You have always professed so warm an attachment.....We are most anxious about father. Do not.....”

“I remember quite well writing this letter,” said I, after a little pause. “It *was* addressed to Gervase Lacer, and I wrote it just before that fatal race which brought us such misery. I had a wild kind of forlorn hope that Mr. Lacer might be able to avert it at the eleventh hour. No one knew of my writing at the time. I told my mother afterward. She will remember.”

“Now, my dearest, the mystery is—*how* did the man in the inn get that letter?”

“To me, Donald, I confess the mystery appears insoluble. I can not even begin to conjecture.”

“Well,” said Donald, laying the scrap of paper on the table, and leaning his forehead on his hand, “I will tell you my notion. It can be but a guess, you know. I think that Lacer was mixed up with a great many blackguards of a thoroughly low and unprincipled sort. Perhaps he was by no means the worst among his associates.”

“I do believe that, Donald!” cried I, quickly. I should have done better to have refrained from the exclamation, as I felt directly it had slipped out. But Donald was too honest-minded to do conscious injustice to any one. So, albeit he looked a shade graver, he was not tempted into contradicting me, but said, quietly: “I say that I think it very likely, my dear. But it is too plain that he was quite devoid of any delicate sense of honor or honesty, and that he spoke of you all at Water-Eardley as he should not have spoken; and made use of his intimacy there to further his own ends. Now it may well be that some fellow still more unscrupulous than he thought it would be a desirable thing to get some hold on your family—thought such a letter as that might serve him in doing so: how can we tell what schemes might have been hatching? Say that this man got hold of the letter surreptitiously; then came the unexpected result of the race, and all that followed it. He could make no use of the letter either with Lacer or your father. He was trying to get away from Horsingham unrecognized. That much is clear. Most likely he had no set purpose of robbery in his head when he entered Dodd’s house. The opportunity tempted him; and he used the letter to remove the oil from his fingers, either not caring to keep it any longer, or else not perceiving in the darkness what it was.”

“Oh! and then there was Flower!” I exclaimed, clasping my hands together with a sudden recollection of that wretch’s parting scene with my mother. Then I told Donald how insolent he had been, and how he had talked vaguely of letters of mine which he knew of.

We talked together for some time longer about the strange business of the letter, speaking in a low tone so as not to disturb grandfather’s slumbers. Donald declared he felt almost convinced that Flower was at the bottom of the matter.

“But what need we care for it further, dear Anne?” he said at length. “It made me very wretched, and brought a dark cloud between us for a weary while. But now the cloud is cleared away forever and a day.”

“Forever, Donald?”

“Is it not, my own one?”

“It is so good of you to trust me, dear. Some people in your place would always be haunted by uncomfortable suspicions of—they knew not what, unless the whole case could be made plainer than I have any power to make it at this time.”

“‘Some people!’ Not people who had once known Anne Furness as I know her.”

Keturah came to the door to call Donald. He had been sent for to a poor patient.

"Don't wake grandfather," I said, warningly; but looking round, I saw my grandfather's eyes wide open, and mildly regarding us. Donald went away at once. I accompanied him through the glass door into the garden, and when I came back to the dining-room, which was now empty, grandfather having gone to his study, I bethought me of the scrap of the letter, and looked for it, intending to examine it once more, and to try to recall the missing words so as to make complete phrases. But it was gone. I searched for it for some time in vain. Then it occurred to me that if Keturah's quick eye had lighted on so untidy-looking a fragment of paper she would undoubtedly have consigned it to the kitchen fire. I thought it best to say nothing about it until Donald should return. And, indeed, of what use was the paper now to any one? It might as well be burned as not, I reflected.

CHAPTER LII.

TILLY CUDBERRY'S visit to Mortlands extended itself from a week to a fortnight, and at the end of a fortnight had by no means come to an end. After the first week she did not trouble us with much of her company. When Donald was at home she would fasten on him—always, as I conjectured, with the same benevolent intention of "drawing him out." But at length, I fancy, some notion of his position with regard to me began to dawn on her; and she relinquished her attempts to enliven him, or, as she would herself have said, to give him "a little style." Besides, her engagements in Horsingham were really surprisingly numerous. She appeared quite to have abandoned the family traditions of exclusiveness and reserve with regard to the outer world, and mingled in such Horsingham dissipations as she could attain to with great affability. Indeed, she appeared willing to know every body, and had quite ceased to declare, in her old way, that "Miss Cudberry of Woolling" could not become acquainted with trades-people, or with obscure persons of unknown pedigree.

One day Tilly persuaded me to accompany her on a shopping expedition into the High Street.

"There's really nobody else I can ask," said she, naïvely; "for Barbara Bunny is never at liberty in the morning—or at least she says so. She's quite a frump! Quite stay-at-home and old-maidish, I assure you, is *poor* Barbara. And as to my walking down High Street with poor Soft—with poor Mrs. Abram—that, of course, is out of the question."

In explanation of the sudden check in my cousin's speech I must state that she had at one time taken the habit of speaking of Mrs. Abram as "Softy," having never relinquished her theory of that good soul's utter imbecility.

But I had so sharply rebuked her for it, and so plainly given her to understand that Dr. Hewson would be seriously offended should he ever hear such an epithet applied to his sister-in-law, that Tilly had thought it best not to persist in the use of it—at all events in speaking to me.

I was not very willing to go, but I could not refuse to accompany Tilly. I had really been called upon to do very little in the way of entertaining her during her visit at Mortlands. We set forth together, and walked in much state down the High Street, closely attended by Roger Bacon, who, by-the-way, had taken a rooted aversion to Tilly, and regarded her with manifest and watchful suspicion—much as an acute policeman might regard a well-known thief, with the quiet and unshakable expectation of his doing something to commit himself presently.

After having made a few unimportant purchases, with as much pomp as though she had been expending enormous sums of money, Tilly announced her intention of proceeding quite to the end of the High Street, and then turning to go home the same way.

"Do you want to buy any thing at the bottom of the High Street?" I asked.

"Oh *dear*, no! But—I might see something that I should be likely to want some day—don't you see?"

In accordance with Tilly's plan we paraded slowly along the street, stopping to look in at every shop window, immensely to Roger Bacon's surprise and discomfiture, who was unaccustomed to such proceedings.

As we passed the corner of a by-street where there were extensive livery-stables, I saw a man standing at an open door, who presently took off his hat and made me a profound bow. In a moment I perceived that the man was Mr. Whiffles. I had seen him once or twice when I had been out in Horsingham; and although the sight of him gave me a painful shock at first, I endeavored not to yield to the feeling which would have prompted me to avoid glancing at him or returning his salute. After all, the man had done no wrong to me or mine. And latterly I had heard that he had given up all connection with races and racing, and had established himself as a livery-stable keeper in Horsingham, where he conducted himself respectably. My informant on this point was Tilly Cudberry, who, as I have mentioned, gathered up every waif and stray of gossip which was to be met with in the town.

I remembered Tilly's old indignation at being compelled to sit in the same room with Mr. Whiffles, and glanced at her in some apprehension when I saw Mr. Whiffles make a second and equally profound bow to her. But, to my relief, she nodded to him very graciously. We passed him, and walked on in silence for some distance.

"What a nice place that is, where the horses are!" said Tilly at length. "And the dwelling-house quite cheerful—the liveliest part of

High Street. The windows look both ways, up *and* down! How extremely cheerful!"

I made no answer, and Tilly presently inquired, in a *huffed* tone, if I were "in the sulks?"

"No, indeed, Tilly."

"What's the matter, then?"

"I—the sight of that man always disturbs my equanimity somewhat. I can not overcome the feeling as yet."

"Oh *dear*! But you ought to overcome it. You *must* overcome it. Goodness, Anne, how very wrong it is to nourish an aversion for a fellow-creature with such extremely respectful and—and—*pleasant*—such pleasant manners as Mr. Whiffles!"

I stared at her for a moment in surprise. But not being willing to pursue the subject, I called Tilly's attention to an orange-colored bonnet in a milliner's window, and thus happily averted any further lecture on my want of charity and tolerance for Mr. Whiffles. I could not help, however, being secretly amused at the spirit of contradiction exhibited by Miss Cudberry. When she had thought that Mr. Whiffles was well received in our old home she had openly expressed her disgust and contempt for him; but now that I rather shrank from the sight of him, Tilly discovered a hitherto unsuspected charm in poor Mr. Whiffles's manners.

As we again passed the livery-stables on our way back (without having bought any thing, after all; for Tilly's purse-strings were always rather tight-drawn, and the principal part of her "shopping" consisted in looking at the goods from the outside of the window) Mr. Whiffles was still standing at the door, and repeated his bows as profoundly as before. I was passing onward, when, to my utter surprise and annoyance, Tilly stopped to say, "And how do *you* do, Mr. Whiffles? You have quite a nice place here, I declare!"

Mr. Whiffles took advantage of the momentary pause to say to me, very quickly and eagerly, "Miss Furness, I hope you'll excuse the liberty, but—I—I am very *hanxious*, indeed, to know how your honored ma is? Of course I have heard, in common with the 'ole of Horsingham, that she was very ill, and is better. But I should like—I mean it would be most agreeable to me to hear that she was—coming round a bit, if you'll overlook the commonness of the expression, Miss Furness."

The man's face and manner showed genuine feeling. I could not but respond to it, although I felt greatly agitated, as the remembrance of our last interview came vividly into my mind.

"Thank you for your interest in my mother," I said. "Every one has been kind and good to her. I am thankful to say that she is well, and quite—quite composed. Good-by, Mr. Whiffles."

But I was not to get away so easily. Tilly was seized with a sudden desire to inspect Mr. Whiffles's stables. "Quite a picture, they tell me in Horsingham! And now *how* many horses

have you, really? One hears such rumors. Wouldn't you like to see them, Anne?"

I shook my head impatiently. "Pray come away," I whispered to her. Mr. Whiffles comprehended the situation better than Tilly did. He twitched his head from side to side, and his red face grew a shade redder as he said, in his melancholy, monotonous, and rather hoarse voice, "Miss—a—Miss Woolling, I'm sure—"

"Cudberry!" corrected Tilly, sharply. And then added, with a superior and condescending smile, "*Of* Woolling. Yes; Miss Cudberry *of* Woolling."

"I'm sure, miss," continued Mr. Whiffles, wisely eschewing the lady's name altogether, "that any time when it came handy, or any ways convenient to you, or any of your friends, to see my place, you'd do me proud if you'd just step in. I should be must 'appy to take you over the place. There's a paddock at the back where you can see 'em exercise a bit sometimes, if you care for that sort of thing, miss. We 'ave one or two bits of blood that jumps very prettily—very prettily, indeed. And say next Monday, or Saturday, between nine and twelve. I shall look on it as a *honor*, miss. Quite so!"

All this time Mr. Whiffles was bowing and edging himself away from Tilly, and, at the end of his speech, he quietly and quickly disappeared round the corner of the street. I was grateful to him for the manœuvre, without which I know not what chance I should have had of inducing Tilly to come away with me.

All that afternoon she talked of Mr. Whiffles; of his horses, his stables, his obliging manners; the remarkable way in which he had pressed her to do him the honor of visiting his place with a chosen party of friends, and of her intention of conferring that honor upon him, and (doubtless) filling him with proud exultation, at a very early date. It was all I could do to prevent her from mentioning the man's name before my mother. But later I discovered that my mother had observed Tilly's hints and mysterious allusions to some "magnificent" horses that she was asked to go and see, and had quietly gained from Judith an explanation of the matter. She took an opportunity of mentioning Mr. Whiffles's name herself, in order to let me understand—dear, good mother!—that I need be under no apprehension of her being too much agitated or distressed at hearing him spoken of. It was true, nothing seemed to startle or disturb her now. I believe it was because her grief was so ever-present to her that no allusion to it could come as a shock of surprise.

In the evening, when we were at tea, Uncle Cudberry appeared with his daughter Clementina and her betrothed. Little Jane Arkwright had by this time ceased to be an inmate of Mortlands, having returned to her parents' home, but on this special evening she had come to drink tea with Mrs. Abram; so that our party in the long dining-room was quite a large one.

Mother slipped away quietly after a short time; and then the talk, which her presence had somewhat subdued, grew louder and more voluble.

Uncle Cudberry had come, as it seemed, chiefly to announce to my grandfather, with all due formality, the engagement of his youngest daughter, and to state that the wedding was fixed to take place in a month. Clemmy had brightened and improved wonderfully under the influence of her new position. She wore her hair loosely curling round her face, I noticed, and seemed to have grown younger. Tilly had previously learned the date of her sister's wedding in a letter from Woolling, so that the news did not take her by surprise. It was a sight to behold her condescension to Clemmy, her lofty and rigid demeanor toward young Hodgekinson, and the indefinable air she assumed of having *separated* herself from her family. I know not how she contrived to convey this, but it was quite perceptible to Mr. Cudberry's stolid observation.

"Well," said he, in his slow manner, "and when are we to have the honor of having you back at Woolling, Miss Cudberry?"

It was an interesting question to most of those present, and there was a general pause in the conversation to hear the reply.

"Oh, *really*, I can't say, I'm sure! Haven't the least idea! I have several invitations in Horsingham. The good people *persecute* me, I *ashaw* you!" (It was in this manner that Tilly pronounced "assure.")

"H'm," grunted Mr. Cudberry. "It's the first I ever heard of the folks bein' so set upon having any on you. We ain't a pop'lar family in general. I don't know as it pays to be partic'lar pop'lar." Then, after a meditative pause, he added, "But it'll be as well to give Dr. Hewson some notion when he's a-going to get quit of you, Miss Cudberry."

Grandfather made a murmur of remonstrance. I am bound to confess it was but a feeble one. Mr. Cudberry entirely disregarded it, and went on:

"And since it seems you can't fix the time, Miss C., why, I must—that's all! You'll come home o' Saturday."

"No, pa!" screamed Tilly, emphatically. "Oh dear, no! I shall do nothing whatever of the kind."

Grandfather could not repress a smile. But he said pleasantly that Miss Cudberry was welcome to remain at Mortlands yet a while longer, if it suited her. In the case of almost any one else he would have given the unlimited invitation to "stay as long as she liked."

Tilly persisting in declining to go home on Saturday, a compromise was come to. She was to remain at Mortlands until the end of the week, and then was to go to some new friends she had picked up.

"Most highly respectable people. Been in India. Husband quite the gentleman, only rather delicate in his health in consequence of the

climate. Got a houseful of curiosities; and Mrs. Nixon might hang herself from head to foot with beagles—no, what-do-you-call-'ems—*bangles*—from head to foot with bangles, if she liked. Most *highly* respectable!" screamed Tilly, shaking her flounces and tossing her head.

So it was settled that to the house of Mr. and Mrs. Nixon she was to repair after leaving us. Her father only made the proviso that she was, in any case, to return to Woolling before the week preceding her sister's wedding.

Tilly then drew Clementina on one side, and began to expatiate on the delights of a sojourn in Horsingham, and the competition among its inhabitants for the pleasure of her (Tilly's) society. Donald good-naturedly talked to "Mrs. Hodgekinson's son," who was shy among strangers; and Uncle Cudberry began speaking to my grandfather.

"Well, Dr. Hewson," said he, "have you heard any thing of those slate quarries the folks is talking of? Some say there's fortunes to be made out on 'em; but, any way, there's fortunes to be *lost*! There's never much trouble in getting rid of your cash—'specially in them companies. I'm always for seeing my way clear, and knowing how the money's spent. Now with them companies there's no telling. Still they *do* say—"

And he went on harping on that string in a manner which led me to fancy he was tempted to invest some money in the speculation.

Later we heard a great deal about the said slate quarries. The notion of forming a company to work them, and of taking shares in the company, appeared to grow rapidly in popular favor. People said that Matthew Kitchen was in it, and that Matthew Kitchen always knew which side his bread was buttered. Look how rich he had grown! And did you suppose all that was done by coach-building? No, no! Mat Kitchen knew a trick worth two of that.

"No doubt he knows a great many tricks," would be my grandfather's curt remark on such speeches. But however much we and others might from our hearts despise him, it was certain that Mr. Kitchen had amassed money, and that he was in consequence a man of considerable influence, who had his followers and his flatterers.

Among those who were interested in the slate quarry project proved to be Dodd. The landlord of the Royal Oak came to speak to my grandfather on the subject one day. What did Dr. Hewson think of it? Dodd had some fields through which a road must pass to the slate quarries, if the slate quarries ever became an accomplished fact. He ought to sell his fields at a pretty tidy price now, oughtn't he? The land where they said the slate was to be found belonged to two or three different owners. But there was talk of a London company coming and buying it all, and working it, and it was to be the making of Diggleton's End—especially good for folks in the public line. And what would Dr. Hewson advise?

Dr. Hewson could advise little or nothing, having small knowledge of the state of the case; which circumstance—my grandfather being a rather uncommon and original sort of man in some things—sufficed to prevent his pronouncing an opinion upon it! But Dodd was a little bitten with the idea of speculating—might not only sell his fields at a high rate, but even perhaps take a few shares in the company. A few shares couldn't hurt! And it would be hard to see all one's neighbors turning a pretty penny, and to get no profit one's self. Dodd was by no means exempt from the Horsingham love of pelf.

However, the matter remained in a vague and rather mythic condition, many reports and opinions circulating respecting it; no single fact authentically known, as it appeared, for a week or so longer. Then it was announced that a London man—a *promoter*, as the phrase went—had seriously taken up the Diggleton's End slate quarries, and was coming down to our county to make inquiries. He was to be accompanied by a gentleman competent to give a technical opinion as to the chances of success in the endeavor to get slate abundant in quantity and excellent in quality from the place indicated.

It all appeared profoundly unimportant to us in our quiet home at Mortlands; but we could not help hearing the gossip that floated hither and thither. After Tilly Cudberry's removal from Mortlands it is true that we heard much less of it. But one day, on returning from a visit to Mrs. Arkwright—now once more established in a little home of her own, and employing her nimble fingers as busily as ever in mending, washing, cooking, and other household employments for her needy little brood—returning, I say, from this visit, I was surprised to learn from my grandfather that the London “promoter” had written him a note asking leave to call on him, as he had some questions to ask which he thought Dr. Hewson would be able to answer, and that close upon the note had followed the writer of it in person.

“What in the world did he come to you for, grandfather?” I asked.

“Difficult to say, child. He thought, perhaps, that, as an old resident, and a medical man, I might have some information to give—”

“About slate quarries?”

“Not about slate quarries, little Nancy, but about the persons who were most likely to buy shares in them, and the circumstances of the persons who own the land where the slate is to be found, and various other matters. He fished a good deal as to my opinion of Matthew Kitchen.”

“And you answered?”

“Very curtly. Told Mr. Promoter that with my opinion of the *man* he had nothing to do; and that as to the man's money-bags I could give no information, and did not see that it was my business to do so if I could.”

“Was it not an unusual proceeding, this stranger's coming here at all?”

“Heaven knows, child. I read here” (putting his hand on a newspaper) “the most incredible accounts of things in general. But of all incredible accounts, the accounts of the way in which ‘companies’ are got up, and simple souls defrauded of their cash, are, perhaps, supreme.”

The London man was named Smith. He had taken up his abode neither at Horsingham nor at Brookfield, but at a small market-town nearer than either of these to W——, our county town. He should not remain fixed there long, he had said. He was very busy, and nearly always “on the wing.” And that was all I heard about him at that time.

CHAPTER LIII.

LET it not be thought that I had quite lightly dismissed the affair of the torn letter from my mind. I thought of it often, and the thought disturbed me. I would have given much to have it all cleared up. Donald trusted me entirely. Yes; I did not doubt that. But I wished that his confidence in me should be, as it were, *rewarded* by the removal of all mystery. I hated the kind of foggy atmosphere which surrounded that one passage of my life in Donald's eyes. It was suffocating and unwholesome. Perhaps, however, I exaggerated both the amount and the balefulness of the “fog.” But then there was another element in the affair of the letter which was painful to me—the thought, namely, of Gervase Lacer's conduct. He had discussed me and my family, and his relations toward us, with strangers: a gratuitous injury, from which he could reap no possible advantage. He had told lies, too; base and spiteful lies. Or might it be that the lies and the spite were added by the man with whom Donald had spoken at the inn? In brief, I was perplexed and worried whenever my thoughts recurred to the matter. But Donald did not seem to give it another thought.

Meanwhile, from one source or another, we heard a good deal of the “quarries,” and of Mr. Smith and Mr. Edwards, the two City gentlemen from London. Mr. Smith was, it seemed, somewhat inaccessible; shrouded in a sort of golden mist from the gaze of the vulgar. A great man he! A rich man! Or, at least, if not rich (for no one could for the life of him affirm wherein the riches of Mr. Smith consisted. Only each one had heard it rumored—great speculator—Stock Exchange—THOUSANDS in a day lost or won!—and similar fragmentary phrases)—if not himself enormously rich, yet the associate of rich men. A “promoter” of riches! and necessarily of much influence in the moneyed world. Mr. Edwards, on the contrary, was much seen in Horsingham. He was the technical gentleman, and was understood to be ready with a favorable report of the slate quarries; quite a glowing report, indeed, peo-

ple affirmed. But we did not happen to meet with any one who had seen it.

Grandfather avoided mentioning in the town that he had been favored by a visit from Mr. Smith. But in some way the news leaked out; probably by means of the coachman who had driven the great man in a fly from Market Diggleton (the little town I have mentioned his sojourning at) to Mortlands. It caused quite an excitement. *Why* should Mr. Smith have called on Dr. Hewson? *What for?* I think that few persons implicitly believed Dr. Hewson when he said he did not know "what for."

Sir Peter Bunny called at Mortlands. He had driven to Market Diggleton, he said, and had been received by Mr. Edwards in a very—yes, a very proper and—and respectful manner. Very much so. But he had failed to see Mr. Smith, Mr. Smith being on the point of starting for London, where his presence was clamored for by the richest of the rich. He must go, even were it but for twenty-four hours. He would, however, return in two days at farthest. Sir Peter Bunny had left his card for Mr. Smith; and—now, in confidence, what did Dr. Hewson think of the slate quarries? Sir Peter supposed he had had the *best* and most *authentic* information, eh? Dr. Hewson knew nothing whatever of the quarries or the company? Really! Ha! Well, well. Then what did Dr. Hewson think of Mr. Smith personally? What, now, was his impression? Come! Always "in confidence," of course.

Dr. Hewson's impression was not too highly favorable, it appeared. My grandfather described the great Mr. Smith as a man apparently under forty, with a great deal of brown beard on his face, and the hair of his head cropped very close. A haggard-looking man, rather, although rather stout than lean. ("Aha! haggard, eh? Enormous pressure of anxiety upon those kind of men! Sums of money they have to deal with so *enormous!*" from Sir Peter.) A restless eye that wandered about the room, as if in search of some one who never came. For the rest, soft-voiced—neither loud nor vulgar; yet with a certain amount of pretentious self-assertion; which, however, perceptibly diminished before the interview was over.

That latter circumstance I could well believe, grandfather not being of the sort which is easily staggered by "pretentious self-assertion," even when founded on solid pillars of coin of the realm. But I gave Mr. Smith credit for some sense and acuteness in that he had perceived this fact, and had mitigated his pretensions accordingly.

Then after Sir Peter Bunny came Alice Dodd, anxious to learn all that could be learned of the prospects of the Diggleton's End Slate Quarries Company; for Dodd had some thought of selling his fields; and though she (Alice) was all against taking shares or *speculating* in the matter—Lord forbid!—still selling the fields was another matter. And Alice's blue eyes

shone with a glance keenly directed toward the main chance.

"Bless the woman!" cried my grandfather, impatiently. "Why come and ask *me*? I wish to Heaven the fellow—this Smith—had never taken it into his head to call on me! All the world supposes, in consequence of his visit, that I have private information about these wretched quarries. My good Mrs. Dodd, I know nothing. But plain common sense—in which you and your husband are not lacking—will tell you how to act in the matter."

Indeed, grandfather was getting impatient of the whole matter, thinking it an inadequate cause for all the pother that was made about it in Horsingham; fearing, too, that unwary persons might be deluded by the "Company." He had a perhaps exaggerated horror of all money speculations, and could not be persuaded to believe in the honest intentions of Messrs. Smith and Co. To all representations that it was as lawful and laudable to sell slate as to sell sugar, and that, if the owners of the quarries were not in a position to work them, it were surely well that several persons should combine to do so, to their own profit and to the advantage of every one who wanted slate—to all such remonstrances and representations he would answer (a little obstinately, dear grandfather!), "Oh yes, yes, yes; it all sounds reasonable and capital. I haven't time to enter into the pros and cons. Life is short, and I am getting near the end of mine. Only I say that I don't like the *cut* of this business, nor the cut of the man Smith. There! Let's have done with it."

It was easy enough to me, for one, to have done with it; and a day or so would have sufficed to obliterate it all from my mind had not the gossips of Horsingham continued to keep it alive there. Even poor Mrs. Arkwright, needle in hand, would expatiate on the chance this investment afforded, "if one *had* but a little capital!" The topic was at least a safe one for her, her husband being removed from that temptation by sheer want of cash to speculate with. But they were doing fairly well now, I was glad to note. They had been living, ever since I first knew them, under the shadow of a cloud. The cloud had burst in a severe enough storm over their heads, but the atmosphere had been much clearer and more wholesome since. They lived now in the Kitchens' old house in Burton's Gardens. I never understood how Mrs. Arkwright contrived to stow away all the children in that tiny residence. But in some way it was effected. And I need not say that the house looked almost *burnished* with cleanliness inside and out. In place of the big escritoire, whereon had stood in old days the white china elephant, with his gilt turret full of ink, there were now several rows of neat shelves—painted and decorated with red leather at their edges by Mrs. Arkwright's own brown busy fingers—supporting Mr. Arkwright's books. Little Jane's chair stood in one corner of the parlor, although little Jane had outgrown it by

this time, and passed her mornings at school, and was become very studious, and "papa" had hopes of her really turning out clever. "Not a genius, you know, Miss Furness. No, no, no. But considering how young she is—little more than a baby still—I think if you were to hear her read poetry you would really—without, I hope, paternal vanity—" And so on. All of which utterances were balm and honey to his poor wife. Mrs. Arkwright professed a Spartan stoicism with regard to little Jane; saying, curtly, that it was well to read poetry nicely to please papa, but that stocking-mending and the deft and accurate adding together of figures must in nowise be shoved into secondary importance. But it was noticeable how willing she was, *in fact*, to relieve the little grave, gray-eyed creature from any thing like drudgery, and how proud she was of little Jane's spiritual gifts—especially of her "turn for poetry"—for which Mrs. Arkwright herself had certainly no turn at all.

About this time Clementina begged me to assist her with my advice as to some of her wedding garments, now in a forward state of preparation. I took the opportunity of my grandfather and Donald being absent from Mortlands for the day to pay this visit. I had arranged that I would stroll over from Woolling to Diggleton's End, and return home from thence at an early hour in the evening. My good friends Mr. and Mrs. Dodd had often pressed me warmly to go and see them. Alice was eager to show me all the glories of the Royal Oak under the reign of its new mistress. I thought I would take her by surprise—Alice was, I knew, one of those completely notable and thorough-going housewives who would be sure to come out triumphantly from the ordeal of being called upon unexpectedly (a dangerous ordeal for many women who think the essence of good management consists in living in a chronic state of fuss)—and would ask her to give me some tea and send me home in the evening. Dodd had said that he would drive me into Horsingham at any time that suited me. "It wouldn't be the first time as I've had that honor, Miss Anne," said he. "Do you remember how often me and Selina took you in to your grandfather's in the old days? Lord! to think of the changes! And now Selina's my sister-in-law, and a rich woman."

"Rich!" echoed Alice. "Why, lad, the gown she'd on her back last time I see her—ten-and-sixpence a yard didn't pay for it. And a gold chain as thick as my little finger! Quite the lady!"

"Quite the *what*?" growled Dodd.

"Well, to look at, I mean."

But Dodd would by no means admit that Mrs. Matthew Kitchen's fine clothes gave her even a distant resemblance to a lady.

It was a pleasant summer noon when I reached Woolling. Poor Clementina was unfeignedly glad to see me. Nor does the statement involve any self-flattery; for her sister

Henrietta chose to look unfavorably on the forthcoming wedding from a lofty and Cudberryan point of view, declined to give any assistance in the preparation of what Uncle Cudberry called the trusso, and never opened her lips on the subject save to utter a sneer or a scoff. Clemmy, therefore, was glad of such assistance and advice as I could give her, and really grateful for being treated with sympathy.

Aunt Cudberry was in a state of nervous excitement beyond her wont.

"It's the breakfast, my dear!" said she, plaintively. "Mrs. Hodgekinson is so particular about her eating, poor thing! And only the day before yesterday she made some quite cutting remarks about the patent gelatine. And how you're to get a glaze on your tongue without it, Anne, I don't know!"

"But *must* you—get a glaze, Aunt Cudberry?" asked I, unable to repress a smile.

"My dear," responded Aunt Cudberry, with much solemnity (although the effect of her impressive manner was somewhat marred by her cap being so much awry as to make her look like "Judy" attired by an unconscientious showman), "I should like to know what Mrs. Hodgekinson would say to a tongue *without* a glaze on it! You don't know what she is, Anne Furness."

"Tell 'ee what, Mrs. C.," put in Uncle Cudberry, looking up stolidly from his paper; "the best thing you can do is to send your tongue to the little lame cabinet-maker in Woolling, and get it French-polished."

And Uncle Cudberry actually winked at me, although with an otherwise grimly unmoved countenance, to bespeak my enjoyment of the joke!

But this want of sympathy with her anxieties reduced his poor wife to tears; and Clemmy and I had a good twenty minutes' work of coaxing and consoling to perform before she would dry her eyes and be comforted.

"It's all very well for Mr. Cudberry," said she, with her face half buried in her large pocket-handkerchief, "and for the girls. *They're* not responsible! It doesn't harrow *their* feelings to hear remarks passed on the puff paste, nor to see a person swallowing your home-made wine in gulps, as if it was castor-oil!"

However, we finally brought her to a more cheerful frame of mind; and she discussed trimmings and patterns with us, and busied her fancy with the fine appearance the whole family would present in their wedding costumes, until she became quite complacent in her own odd way, and drew herself up, and bridled and sidled and made faces, with an air of conscious quality. Poor Aunt Cudberry! She was the least selfish of the family party, and was generally contented to shine with a reflected light.

At the dinner-hour young Hodgekinson appeared, and after a brief and merely formal resistance, was persuaded to stay and dine at Woolling.

"It's disgusting!" said Henny, in so loud a

tone that I feared her future brother-in-law would hear her.

"Oh, don't be cross with William, Henny!" remonstrated Clementina, meekly. She certainly had grown more gentle since her engagement, and appeared to wish to conciliate her sisters. But they were not to be conciliated.

"I say it is *disgusting*, Clementina!" rejoined Henny, with increased asperity. "Mrs. Hodgekinson's son is here to dinner four days a week. He *lives* at Woolling. He has fastened himself on the family in a manner equally devoid of decorum and—and—deference. Any approach to style was naturally not to be expected from Mrs. Hodgekinson's son; but one might look for a little respect and appreciation for the family he is about to ally himself with!"

"Well, really," said I, a little impatiently, "I think William Hodgekinson is uncommonly kind and civil, and the soul of good temper."

Henny turned on me with a snap.

"When Mrs. Hodgekinson's son gorges himself to repletion four times a week at *your* table, and addresses *you* in his clod-hopping language as 'old lass,' before your man-servant, who nudges your elbow and says 'It's *you* he means, miss!' you will be qualified to judge of Mrs. Hodgekinson's son's manners, and not before, Anne Furness."

I had an opportunity of studying the youth's manners that very afternoon; for he was good enough, on hearing that I meant to walk to Diggleton's End, to offer to escort me part of the way thither. And as Clementina seemed rather pleased than otherwise that her betrothed should vindicate his reputation for politeness, so mercilessly assailed by Henny, I accepted his offer, and we set off together.

Under other circumstances I might have been at a loss what to say to him, but as it was, I discoursed of my cousin Clemmy with the pleasing certainty that I should not weary my hearer. He was really fond of her, and informed me in strict confidence that he thought she'd be "as pleasant as pleasant to get on with" when once she was out of her father's house. "You see, miss, her sisters are always on the worrit, and it tries the temper a bit. I think they're jealous of Clemmy getting married afore 'em!" he added, with an air of profundity, and looking at me with his head on one side, as though he were hazarding some very daring and unexpected conjecture.

"Oh, by-the-by, miss," he said, suddenly, after a rather long pause, "do you know a person by the name of Flower, that says he was once groom in your family?"

This unexpected mention of the fellow's name made my heart sick. But I answered that I did know such a man, who had been groom at Water-Eardley. And I inquired why he asked the question.

He answered that Flower had been for some days in the neighborhood trying to obtain a situation, and that he had applied to Farmer Hodgekinson among other persons.

"Father didn't seem to see taking the man himself—at least mother didn't like the look of him, and father thought the same when mother mentioned it—but there's a person of our acquaintance about five-and-thirty miles from here that breeds horses for the London market, and we thought of recommending Flower to try with him. I suppose he knows his business, miss?"

"I believe so."

"Why—O Lord, what a clumsy blockhead I was to be talking to you about—! You've gone quite pale. I forgot that I did hear of that fellow Flower being with your poor father, miss, when— There, I'm only making it worse! I do ask your pardon; I do, indeed!"

"There is nothing to pardon. I am sure you did not mean to hurt me. I am not sorry that you mentioned this man, since I think it right to warn you on no account to recommend him as an inmate of any decent family. He is drunken, insolent, and dishonest. He understands the management of horses, however, and if he were employed solely in the stables, he might make a valuable servant for such a person as the acquaintance you speak of."

"Nay, I sha'n't recommend him at all, if he's such as you say, miss. No more won't mother on any account. And father's sure to think the same as mother."

I changed the subject, which was hateful to me; and we walked on, peaceably, he chatting of Clemmy and I listening, until we reached the end of Uncle Cudberry's domain, and he would have accompanied me further had I not forbidden him to do so. I preferred to stroll along with no other companion than my own thoughts. I knew every inch of the ground. It was a pleasant walk in the fair, sunny afternoon, through a leafy lane that wound along between the fields; and I was going onward peaceably enough, when I saw the figure of a man leaning with both elbows upon a gate at some distance ahead of me.

Now in this fact there was nothing to startle me. Yet I was startled. I even stopped for a moment quite suddenly; and I found that my pulses were greatly quickened, and that I was breathing short. How absurd! What could there be to fear? Fear! no; it was not fear that I felt. I was within call of more than one cottage. There were husbandmen working in the fields not far off. And, besides, why should I fear a peaceable wayfarer taking an afternoon stroll, or loitering on his way to look at the landscape?

The man was dressed like a gentleman. He stood quite still, leaning on the gate, until, as I supposed, the sound of my approaching footstep caught his ear. Then he turned his head and looked at me. A bearded face, with hat pulled down low upon the brow. Nothing to alarm one in all that! Yet this time I stopped again, nearly suffocated by the beating of my heart.

"Anne! Have you quite forgotten me? It

is not so long since we met," said the stranger, in a low voice.

"Good Heavens! Gervase Lacer!"

CHAPTER LIV.

It was he indeed! and it was doubtless my half-unconscious recognition of him at a distance which had so startled me. Now that I saw him well, I perceived that he was greatly changed. The thick beard disguised his face considerably. He was pale—of a leaden, unwholesome hue—and his eyes were sunken and restless. He bore himself erect still, in his old soldier fashion, but his head drooped forward a good deal. I *might* have passed him with no more than that vague, half-unconscious recognition I have alluded to, had he not spoken. The voice there was no mistaking. No change in that.

"What brings you here? When did you come?" I asked, blurting out the question in my surprise and agitation.

"You don't know who I am!" he answered, looking at me in a strange way, and putting up his hand to his lips—a gesture which, by-the-way, he frequently and restlessly repeated during our interview.

In an instant it flashed upon me.

"You are here under a false name!" I exclaimed.

"I am Mr. Smith," he answered, very quietly, and still looking at me in that strange way. "How did you guess it?"

"I—I do not know—I can not tell. Some word of description dropped by my grandfather made it come into my mind. But—why? how? It is like a wild dream to me!"

"You asked me what brought me here," he said (and I could see now that he too was greatly moved, and that his hand shook as he raised it to twitch nervously at his mouth and beard).

"You brought me here! If it had not been for the hope of seeing you, Anne Furness, I would have let the place burn to ashes before I would have set eyes on it again!"

I stood silent, with a heart full of unutterable things.

"And now I am here—after all that has come and gone—you won't say a word to me. You will scarcely look at me."

I remained dumb, not because I would not, but because I could not speak. Then he broke out incoherently, in his old impetuous way—with an impetuosity which I now recognized to be born of weakness, not strength, and growing ever more excited and ungoverned.

He had lain in wait for me. He had heard that I was to be at Woolling that afternoon. He had vainly cast about for some other mode of seeing me, had feared to risk writing to me, and so had resolved on this method. He had gone to Mortlands in the hope of catching sight of me. His visit had had no other motive. He had not feared to meet Dr. Hew-

son, who had never seen him in the old days, and would not suspect that Gervase Lacer and Mr. Smith, of City celebrity, were one and the same person. For the rest, he had kept out of sight of Horsingham people as far as it was possible to do so. But he risked being recognized at any moment, and all for *my* sake! Did I not see, would I not believe and acknowledge, that his love for me had been true and sincere? "I could not stay away, Anne. When first some talk of forming a company to work slate quarries here came to my ears the idea took possession of me that I might in that way have a chance of seeing you again. No human being guessed what made me so keen to come here," he said, speaking in a quiet, disjointed way, and looking at me—not steadily, but with short, eager, restless glances.

I clasped my hands together sorrowfully. "I wish—oh, how I wish!—that you had not come," I exclaimed.

That hurt him terribly. I was sorry for him, and should have been yet more sorry had I not instinctively been aware that it was his vanity, fully as much or more than his feelings, which was wounded.

"You are as hard-hearted as ever," he exclaimed, angrily. "A mere block of ice! I wonder I don't cease—have not long ago ceased—to care for so unfeeling a woman."

I made no retort, no defense even. I was sorry for him. Then in a moment his mood changed, and he asked my pardon even with tears in his eyes. I was pained by the whole scene. I could not properly collect my thoughts, and I felt but one strong impulse—to be gone, and be alone for a little while. But he so implored me to remain yet an instant, and yet another instant when that was gone, and began telling me in so earnest though confused a way of all the vicissitudes he had gone through since we had parted, that I stood irresolutely listening to him.

So confused was his story that much of it was unintelligible to me. It was long, too, and vague and rambling. But I will condense the main points of it, which I was able to seize upon, as well as I can.

Soon after he had left Horsingham his father had died, leaving the bulk of his money to Gervase's step-mother. Some small sum, however, had come to the son, and with this he had speculated in a reckless way. He (Gervase) had a friend—an old school-fellow, I believe he said—who was a rising man of business in the City, a stock-broker. From this man—on whom, as I gathered, he had once rather loftily looked down—he had received advice and substantial kindness. The reckless speculations turned out luckily; the stock-broking friend put him in the way of making other speculations, *not* reckless. Gervase quickly became initiated into the arcana of such money-gambling. He was superior in manner to most of his new associates. "A gentleman, you know. It gives me *some* advantages!" and

made his way with unexpected rapidity. He quickly found that a solid basis of capital was little needful—if at all needful—for success. “Dash,” intelligence, a quick eye for the signs of the times—these qualities, he declared, together with boldness, had been the secret of his rise in the world. He *had* risen, he considered, and was still rising. Such a career was not unexampled. He had assumed a common name in order effectually to cut himself adrift from the past and all that tied him to it.

Such was Gervase Lacer’s story in the chief points of the narration. I omit the strain of boastfulness that ran through it—a boastfulness mingled, too, with self-distrust, and something like shame. Nay, perhaps it was shame trying to hide herself which had assumed boastfulness as a cloak!

Then he broke into a different strain.

He protested to me that he had never forgotten me, never ceased for one day to think of me and feel for me and love me in all the terrible sorrow which came upon us, and of which he heard in a distant and indirect manner. He said that when the first gleam of good fortune had begun to shine upon him he was spurred on to pursue it eagerly by the thought of me. “See, Anne,” he said, “you have been the one good thing in my life. You made me believe goodness to be possible—I had got to doubt it. My life has been very hard, and has taught me hard things. Oh, if it had all gone smoothly—if you could have been kinder to me, and given me a real hope to go upon—how different— But I won’t look back. It’s a dreary prospect. Anne, can’t you throw me one word of encouragement? I know you don’t care for riches, but I may be rich some day. I *will* be rich if you speak the word. And your mother—if you tell her how I have struggled, and what prospects I have, *she* will see; she will recognize that I am true in this, at least. I would devote myself to her. There is nothing I wouldn’t do to win her good opinion. I have acted wrongly on many points—you must remember what I told you of my early days—but on this, as true as there’s a Heaven above us, I am in earnest. Look, Anne, look here!” fumbling with an unsteady, impatient hand in his breast; “see how I have treasured this! It has not parted from me night or day since I left you. It’s a little thing, but it shows how constant my feeling has been.”

He pulled out a little flat leather case, more like a miniature port-folio than a pocket-book, and, half opening it, gave me a glimpse of a folded letter, which I recognized as being in my handwriting.

“A letter of mine! You must restore that to me!” I cried, hastily. “You have no right to keep it.”

“No right! No right to keep a letter addressed to myself? What do you fear, Anne? There is no word in this letter which you need be ashamed of.”

“Ashamed!” I echoed, drawing myself up and looking full at him, for the word had angered me. “I never wrote a letter in my life which I need be *ashamed* of.”

“Then do you suspect I should make any ill use of your letter? You *can not* suspect that?”

“No; I do not think you would; I hope—I believe—you would not. But if I did suspect you, my suspicion would not be altogether so groundless as you seem to assume.”

He changed color, and recoiled a step. “What do you mean?” he asked, almost roughly.

“You have been, at least, imprudent, and have spoken as you should not. I have reason to know it,” said I, thinking for the moment of Flower and his insolent sneers to my mother. “But I do not wish to recriminate or to accuse you. Pray—I ask it as a favor—restore me my letter. Is it the only one of mine in your possession? So far as I remember, I only wrote to you twice in my life.”

“Only twice, Anne. And this is the only scrap of your dear handwriting that I possess. How can you ask me to part with it?” This time his tone was soft and sad, and he looked at me as though hesitating whether to comply or not.

“And the other note,” I said, struck by a sudden idea, “what became of it?”

“I can’t tell. Lost, or perhaps stolen from me.”

“Stolen? Who should steal so worthless a thing?”

“How can I say? I am a careless fellow. When I left this place I left many papers behind me.”

“Could Flower, our groom, ever have had access to them?”

“It is possible. He came about my place more than once. But why do you ask?”

“No matter. Will you give me back that letter? Will you, at least, let me look at it?”

He half advanced his hand, and then paused and withdrew it.

“If you will say one kind word to me, Anne—if you will tell me that you do not hate me outright.”

“Indeed I do not hate you! But you have acted so wrongly. I can not help saying so. Why did you leave Horsingham clandestinely? Why, when things began to go better with you, did you not strive to repay the money you owed here? You have been so ill spoken of in consequence! And the worst is—not unjustly.”

“Do you care for it?” he asked, with sudden eagerness. “Does it matter in the least to you? If I thought so—if I had the least hope of it—I *will* pay what debts I have here, of course. I always intended to do so. But they are leeches, these Horsingham people. They suck the very blood of you. Extortionate, greedy— Why, if they got one-fifth of their charges they would be well paid!

However, if you will say a kind word to me, Anne, I will do any thing!"

He stretched his hand out to take mine with such vehemence that I recoiled, startled for the instant.

"No! I can not understand such conditions. If you are not willing to do right for its own sake, is it possible that I should ask you to do it for mine?"

"You are so proud—so icy! You refuse even to give me your hand!"

In truth, I could not give it to him. The feeling he still professed for me rendered that impossible. I felt that he would not accept it as a mere act of forgiveness—a mere symbol of farewell without rancor on my part. At the same time, I had real compassion for him in my heart. Involuntarily I compared the blessedness of my lot in being Donald's promised wife with this man's loneliness and discontent. He *was* unhappy. That I could not doubt.

"I would earnestly advise you to leave this place," said I. "The more I think of it, the more I wonder that you should have risked coming here under a feigned name. You have made many enemies in Horsingham."

"I know it," he answered, bitterly. "But the feeling which brought me here was stronger than prudence, although you seem unable to understand that!" Then he added, in a different tone, "You can betray me if you choose. I dare say some of your virtuous friends would advise you to do so."

"Betray you!"

"Yes; it is always your superexcellent people who hate to give a poor devil a chance. And 'of course it's your duty to expose an impostor!'"

He looked at me curiously as he said this, almost as though asking a question.

"If it were clear to me that such was my duty, I should try to do it," I answered, with as much firmness as I could muster.

"Do as you will, Anne; I have trusted you."

Had he tried to extort any promise of secrecy from me, I should have refused to give it. But his last words constituted a powerful appeal to my nature.

"You know that I shall not betray you," I exclaimed, impulsively.

"You have said it, Anne."

"I have said it—if that were needful."

"There is no one like you in all the world! And yet—and yet just now you refused to give me your hand!"

"If it will give you any comfort to know that I part from you without ill-will—that for the sake of old times I wish you well, and desire that you may use your present opportunities for your real and lasting good—I can say that much sincerely."

"Nothing more?"

I looked at him, and slowly shook my head.

"Anne" (bringing out the words with a

kind of desperation, and pressing his hands strongly together as he spoke), "will you give me a hope—I don't care how distant—that you could ever bring yourself to marry me?"

"Oh!—never!"

"Anne—think once more! No one can love you as I love you. Whatever I may be, or however unworthy of you, I am sure of *that*. It would be the saving of me. I should never have gone so far wrong if I had had the hope of winning you long ago. But when I left Water-Eardley I was desperate—I cared for nothing—I was ready to— Well, I won't think of that again. I will look forward. I will try. I will be a changed man. Only give me, not a promise—I don't ask for a promise—but a ray of hope."

He caught my cloak and detained me as I was moving away.

"Never! It is impossible. Let me go; you distress me beyond measure."

"Anne, is that your last word?"

"My last word, now and always. This is madness. Let me go, I insist!"

"One question! Are you engaged? Only the other day I heard that that Ayrle was at your grandfather's, curse him! I hoped he had been gone long ago—to India or to the devil!"

"I shall answer nothing more. If you dare to detain me another moment I shall call to those laborers, and you will repent having driven me to do that."

He released me, but stood directly in my pathway with folded arms, looking at me in so wild and savage a manner that I was really alarmed, though indignation made me preserve an unflinching front.

"Well," said Gervase at length, in a low, threatening tone, "since you refuse to answer, I know what to believe. Your letter? No! You shall never have your letter. And as to *him*—let him keep out of my way if he can. Whatever happens, it is all on your head."

I brushed resolutely past him without another word, and pushed on down the lane at a steady, rapid pace, not once looking behind me until I came to a turn about a quarter of a mile distant. Then I stopped and cautiously glanced round. The lane was quite deserted—no human being in sight. I had passed the pathway that led to Dodd's house. And, indeed, I had resolved that I would not go there. I could not at that moment have endured Alice's sharp eyes and voluble tongue. I was panting and trembling like a hunted creature; albeit not with fear, or not *all* with fear. I sat down on a green knoll beneath a hedge-row tree and buried my throbbing head in my hands.

CHAPTER LV.

I WAS roused by hearing footsteps coming along the road toward me. For an instant the dread came over me that it might be Lacer re-

turning. I looked up resolutely, but was reassured by a glimpse I had of a man's figure very different from his—much shorter and slighter—walking briskly along. I rose and moved confusedly on in the direction toward Horsingham without again looking round.

When I began to walk I found my limbs tremble under me, and my head was hot and aching. But I went on.

The approaching person soon overtook me, and spoke to me by name—"Miss Furness! Miss Anne!"

It was Dodd. He looked more surprised to find me than I thought he need have done, seeing that I was still so near to my uncle Cudberry's house, and that I was accustomed to walk out in solitary independence.

But his next words explained his surprise, and made me turn hot and then cold.

"Why, it is you, Miss Anne! I wasn't sure when I first saw you talking to that Mr. Smith."

"I was coming from Woolling—I have been at my uncle's," I stammered out, scarcely knowing what I was saying. The consciousness that my manner must appear strange and confused increased my confusion almost to agony, although I doubtless appeared more self-possessed than I was in reality.

"I had heard that this chap went to see the doctor—your grandfather, miss—but I didn't know as *you* knew him too," pursued Dodd, casting an inquisitive side glance at me as he spoke. I suppose my face startled him, for he cried, "How white you are, Miss Anne! Ain't you well?"

"I have a racking headache, and feel very weak," I answered.

"Lord bless ye, miss, come along back wi' me to the Royal Oak and rest ye, and let my missis get you something. Do, now!"

"No; no, thank you, Dodd; I would rather go home."

"But you shall drive home, miss, when you've rested a bit. I'm sure you ought never to think of walking wi' your head so bad!"

But I was obdurate. I was resolved to go home at once; and Dodd, finding me so, ceased to importune me. He asked leave to walk with me as far as the end of the lane, as he was going in that direction. "Not but it's safe enough hereabouts, as ever I heard on," he added. "There wouldn't be any fear of a lady getting annoyed if she happened to be walking by herself. No tramps nor ragamuffins frequents this lane."

Then, after a momentary pause, and another curious glance at me, he said, "Though, to be sure, it isn't always the raggedest chaps as are the biggest rascals."

I made an effort to answer unconcernedly. "Oh, I never feel alarmed in this neighborhood, Dodd. I have known every road and lane and meadow in it from a child; and all the cottagers too. I am at home here."

"Ah, but there's a good many more strangers about than there used to be."

I was silent.

"There's that gent you was talking to, miss; *he's* a stranger," continued Dodd. He had approached the subject circuitously, which convinced me that he was puzzled and vaguely suspicious. It was not out of the range of a Horsingham imagination that my grandfather and I should have mercenary reasons for keeping our acquaintance with "Mr. Smith" private. And yet to one who knew my grandfather as well as Dodd knew him it surely must appear in the highest degree improbable that he should scheme to obtain any peculiar privileges by means of the chief personage in a company of speculators!

But whatever it was that Dodd surmised, I could ask for no explanation from him. I walked on silently, and suffering in mind and body. I parted from Dodd at the end of the lane, and reached home without further adventure.

My headache furnished a real and sufficient excuse for going at once to my own room; as also for my having returned without visiting Alice Dodd, as I had meant to do.

Donald and my grandfather had not come back from their country expedition. They had gone chiefly to look at a horse which Donald thought of buying; "and," said my mother, "it is a great pity you were not able to go to Alice's house, for your grandfather said that their errand would take him and Donald into the neighborhood of Diggleton's End. And you might have come home all together."

I felt very miserable as I lay with closed eyes on my bed, revolving painfully in my mind the unexpected incident of my meeting with Lacer. My mother had left me to myself, under the impression that I might get some sleep. But sleep was far from my aching brain.

Would Gervase Lacer leave Horsingham, as I had urged him to do? Was I not bound by my promise "not to betray him" to keep his presence here a secret even from Donald? If Lacer were once away, I could tell Donald every thing. At the bottom of my heart there was a great dread of these two men being brought into contact with each other.

I remained in my room during the remainder of that evening. I was, in truth, suffering very severely from headache. I heard the sound of my grandfather's voice, loud and hearty, when he returned about seven o'clock, while my room was still light, notwithstanding that mother had taken the precaution of drawing the white curtains across the window. Then there was a hush in the house. Donald and grandfather had been told that I was unwell, and would not disturb me. Once I heard my grandfather's chamber door open and shut softly, and his footstep, very light and cautious, on the stair. Finally, after it had long been as near dark as it was to be all the summer night, I fell asleep, and slept soundly.

"Mr. Donald's dear love, miss, and he hopes you have rested well and are better."

These words were the first I heard next

morning, and Eliza stood by my bedside with a little note in her hand. The note was from Donald, and contained the following words:

"DEAREST,—I am obliged to go away early without waiting to see you. A strange thing has happened, of which I must speak to you this afternoon when we meet. Be well, darling, when I come back. I grieved so for your headache! Your own, D. A."

What was the "strange thing" that had happened I had no chance of learning from any one at Mortlands until Donald's return, for my grandfather was away also, whether with Donald or on other business of his own he had not stated.

I was tormented all the morning by conjectures and apprehensions lest the "strange thing" which Donald had to tell me should prove to have reference to Gervase Lacer. But about mid-day a diversion was forcibly given to my thoughts by a visit from Tilly Cudberry. She had not bestowed much notice on the inmates of Mortlands since leaving it for the house of her new friends, Mr. and Mrs. Nixon. However, on this day she appeared among us in quite an excited state; and before uttering any of the usual greetings she exclaimed, looking round upon my mother, Mrs. Abram, and me, as we sat in the parlor, "The Nixons got theirs this morning! Have you had yours yet?"

Poor Judith edged up a little nearer to me and murmured, faintly, "Got what? Anne, is it any thing catching, love?"

"*'Third daughter!'* I hope it's marked enough! Why publish that to the parish? I should have thought 'daughter' would have been quite sufficient myself. But *third daughter!*—I never knew any thing so marked in all my life!"

At this enigmatical utterance Mrs. Abram's bewilderment was so complete that she looked absolutely scared. I hastened to relieve her mind by saying:

"You are speaking of the cards of invitation to Clementina's wedding, are you not, Tilly? Yes; ours came this morning."

"This day fortnight. Ha! Very well—*very well!*" (This with a nod of the head full of mysterious meaning.) "Mrs. Nixon means to wear a sky-blue moiré; and if silk velvet was suitable to the time of year there's no reason on earth why she shouldn't have *that*. Money is no object. I have no doubt that Mrs. Hodgekinson will bedizen herself at a fine rate on the occasion; but Mrs. Nixon can cut out Mrs. Hodgekinson, I should hope! A sky-blue moiré, and corn flowers in her bonnet. Such is her present intention. But I *beg* you not to mention it to any of the Woolling people, for they would be quite capable of taking a mean advantage, and telling Mrs. Hodgekinson. And then *nothing* would prevent that woman from wearing sky-blue and corn flowers herself!"

"And you, Tilly," said my mother, willing

to divert the wrath which the mention of Mrs. Hodgekinson always excited in our fair cousin's breast, "what do *you* mean to wear on the great occasion? You and Henrietta are to be bridesmaids, of course?"

Tilly's face was a study, and, I confess, an utterly inscrutable one to me, as, drawing herself up with a jerk, she made answer:

"Bridemaids? Of course—oh, of course! At the wedding of pa's *third* daughter! No doubt. And as to wearing—what does it matter what *I* wear! Miss Cudberry of Woolling used to be considered rather a feature in her own house, Mrs. George, so I don't wonder at your thinking she would be so still; but you're sadly behind the times, I can assure you. We have altered all that. The feature at Woolling is pa's *third* daughter, not Miss Cudberry. Oh dear, no!"

To this speech there was no reply to be made—at least none of a peaceable and conciliatory nature. But fortunately our silence had no depressing effect on Tilly. She was in a state of surprising high spirits. I say "surprising," because it was but a short time ago that any reference to her sister's approaching marriage, and to what she was pleased to term "Mrs. Hodgekinson's son's disgraceful treachery" to herself, would have sufficed to make her assume an air of gloomy grandeur, as of one injured past redress. But now, although bitter and scornful, she was certainly not gloomy. Indeed, she chattered on at so unmerciful a rate, was so vivacious and discursive, treated us to so many anecdotes of her friends the Nixons (not entirely exempting them, however, from ridicule and censure; she was too true a Cudberry at heart to spare any one altogether), that Judith fairly closed her eyes and gave a little groan, under the painful effort of trying to follow the vagaries of Tilly's erratic discourse. Mother and I listened quietly, occasionally exchanging a glance of amazement, and once or twice a faint smile flitted across mother's face. Smiles were so rare there now that I felt almost grateful to Tilly for having called them up.

At length Tilly rose to go away. And having said "good-by" graciously to me, and with pitying patronage to Mrs. Abram, she approached my mother's sofa, and, after an instant's hesitation, bent down and kissed her.

"Good-by, Mrs. George," she said, in a tone that was almost soft for her. Then she added, rather more debonairly, "I dare say it may be some time before I see you again."

"Why so, Tilly? Are you going to cut us altogether?" I asked, laughingly.

Tilly answered as though my mother had spoken. "No, Mrs. George; *I* ain't going to cut you. If there is to be any cutting it won't come from me—at least as far as the Mortlands people are concerned. As to the Woolling people, circumstances must wholly determine. The Woolling people must take their chance. I have sacrificed myself quite enough already for the Woolling people."

And with this mysterious speech she took her departure.

"I don't understand Tilly to-day at all," said my mother.

"Oh, *don't* you?" cried Mrs. Abram, huskily, and clasping her hands with fervor. "I am so glad!"

"For goodness' sake, why should you be glad of that, my dear Judith?" asked my mother.

"Oh, because—because I began to be afraid, dear, that not understanding her was all the fault of my poor brain. It is not so clear, at times, as it should be, I am aware. And do you know, Lucy—I don't know whether it has ever happened to you or to Anne—but really and truly, when Miss Cudberry is talking, I very often don't know whether it's inside my own head or outside! It's a very curious sensation, and I dare say cleverer persons than I am may not feel it. But with me, I assure you that when I have been listening to Miss Cudberry for a little while there comes a great buzzing in my ears, and my head swims, and I don't understand one syllable she is saying. I suppose," added poor Judith, with a plaintive sigh, "it's *his* doing."

It was close upon our dinner-hour, and we were still discussing Tilly's newly developed emancipation from the family traditions, when grandfather came home alone. Donald, he said, had sent word that he should be detained in the country, and might not be home until quite evening. Already, for a long time, Donald had taken on himself the more laborious part of grandfather's practice—nearly all that lay among the very poor patients, for example, whom he gratuitously attended. It was, therefore, a not infrequent occurrence for Donald to be absent during a great part of the day, and my mother and Mrs. Abram took it as a matter of course. For my own own part, I could not help wondering whether Donald's prolonged absence might not be connected with the happening of the "strange thing" to which he had alluded in his note, and whether grandfather knew it, and what it was. I could not help, moreover, watching grandfather's countenance, and I thought I detected on it a certain amount of preoccupation.

However, my own was, in truth, the only anxious face at table. Mother was cheerful in her quiet way, and made me repeat all Tilly Cudberry's old sayings and doings for grandfather's amusement. He listened and laughed, and exclaimed at intervals, "What an incredible woman! What a stupendous woman!" And when poor Mrs. Abram—with a lugubrious reference to "*his*" adverse influence—dolefully related the mysterious experience she underwent during a long spell of Miss Cudberry's eloquence, and especially dwelt on her painful uncertainty as to whether the talking were outside or inside her own head, grandfather immensely gratified and relieved her by saying, "My dear Judith, you are quite right. You have aptly described a sensation which Miss

Cudberry's conversation has frequently produced in myself—only I have never been able to express it."

After dinner Mrs. Abram retired to her room; mother had some shawls and cushions carried into the garden, and composed herself on a rustic bench with a book in her hand, and grandfather sat in his great chair, and closed his eyes for his customary after-dinner sleep. Grandfather was very old now, and needed rest. I was painfully restless and ill at ease. I wandered about the shrubbery, or seated myself in the shadow of a tree, only to rise and walk about again after a minute or two. At length in my restless paces to and fro I came to the glass door of the dining-room, which stood open to admit the sweet summer air, and as I paused, looking in, grandfather's eyes unclosed and met mine, and he beckoned me with his hand.

"Grandfather," said I, advancing to him, "do you know what the 'strange thing' is which Donald tells me has happened?"

"Why," he answered with a faint smile that just flitted across his face and was gone, "I think I do know. But it's a secret!"

"It is nothing painful—nothing that grieves you or Donald, is it?" I asked, a good deal relieved by his manner.

"Not at all! not at all! I never knew you curious before, little Nancy." He looked at me more searchingly than he had hitherto done, and then added, in a graver tone: "It is a queer business, and may turn out to be all a fond imagination on the part of Dodd; but in any case it is best not to speak of it incautiously. I had special reasons for saying no word on the subject before your dear mother, for it would have touched upon the time of her great sorrow, and we can not be too careful not to set that chord quivering."

It was, indeed, no overstrained precaution on our part to avoid the least allusion—or, at all events, the least sudden allusion—to that dreadful period in mother's presence. A careless word might at any time have brought back the hysterical convulsions which had so prostrated her strength.

"Then," said I, "this 'strange thing' has reference in some way to—"

"To that time—to that time, little Nancy. Don't look so distressed, my child. It is nothing with which our feelings are much concerned, after all."

He bent down to caress the dog that lay at his feet, and said, as he played with the animal and stroked it, "Now you know, little Nancy, how certain people scolded me, and lectured me, and strove to show me the error of my ways, when I professed to have my suspicions of the precious 'Company' and the precious 'City gentleman' at the head of it! Well, wait a while! wait a while! Suppose it should turn out that this Mr. Smith—My child, what is the matter?"

He had been talking on cheerfully, and in a half-bantering tone, still stroking the dog; but

on lifting his eyes to my face his tone changed, and as he took my hand his own hand trembled.

"Will they meet?" I cried. "Will Donald come in contact with this man?" Then in a moment I was breathlessly pouring out the story of my interview with Gervase Lacer. I told him every thing—Lacer's profession of repentance and his promises of amendment; then his jealousy and anger against Donald; and finally my promise not to betray him, if he would leave our neighborhood and seek to molest me no more. It had seemed so unlikely that Donald should cross his path in any way that I had hoped Lacer might depart without seeing him. But now an unforeseen circumstance appeared to threaten the evil I so dreaded. Grandfather turned on me a face of wonder, but he did not interrupt me by a single word. When I had finished he said, smoothing my hand reassuringly:

"No, no; no, no, my child; don't fear for Donald. The scoundrel's threats make no impression on me. Such rascals don't talk of it beforehand when they mean mischief. It was all said to frighten you. What a despicable villain it is!" He uttered the last exclamation with sudden heat and violence. He had been speaking before in a pondering tone, with his head bent down.

But I was far from feeling reassured.

"Oh," I cried, "I would give the world that Gervase Lacer were fairly away from this place! I can not breathe freely while he is lingering here. And for mother's sake, too—"

Grandfather suddenly rose up from his chair with more vigor of movement than I had seen in him for many a day, and rang so peremptory a peal at the bell as brought Eliza to the dining-room door much quicker than was her wont. He then ordered that the pony should be harnessed, and the groom told to make ready to accompany his master at once. His orders were habitually obeyed with promptitude, but on this occasion an unusual degree of speed was infused into the groom's movements.

"What will you say to me if I can get rid of this fellow *at once*? Get rid of him so that he shall never more trouble Horsingham? I believe there *is* a way!" said my grandfather. And then without waiting for a reply, he hurried into the hall, where he stood impatiently pulling on his driving gloves.

The chaise was brought round so quickly that I had scarcely had time to ask any questions before grandfather stepped into the little vehicle. In reply to my hurried word or two of inquiry he merely said: "I believe there *is* a way, little Nancy. Tell your mother I am gone on business. When Donald comes back—if he returns before I do—say the same to him, and ask him to await my return for an explanation. Let no one be uneasy if I am late. God bless thee, child; good-by!"

I heard him say to the groom, "Take the nearest way to Market Diggleton;" and then the chaise rolled away.

CHAPTER LVI.

It grew overcast and began to rain. I could not go into the garden. I was so nervous and miserable as I sat with my mother and Mrs. Abram in the long dining-room—mother always preferred that room in summer, because it opened on to the garden—that I feared they would observe it. As it grew later mother said, once or twice:

"I wonder what can keep your grandfather so long! I hope he is not overtiring himself."

I told her that he had warned us not to be uneasy if he were late.

"Perhaps he has gone over to Woolling," she said. "Eliza tells me that he ordered the man to drive to Market Diggleton. That is not so very far from your uncle Cudberry's house. I should not wonder at all if he were there. I'm sorry it has turned out such a bad night. Perhaps Mrs. Cudberry may send him home in their covered vehicle. He would get wet through in the chaise."

She had no apprehension that there was any thing amiss.

Nine o'clock came; half past nine; ten; and yet neither Donald nor my grandfather appeared. Judith set herself to conjure up a variety of evils which might have overtaken them. Perhaps the chaise had been upset. Perhaps the pony had broken his leg. Perhaps grandfather had been taken ill. Perhaps Mr. Cudberry's house was being burned down, and Donald and the doctor were remaining to assist in putting out the conflagration!

"There will be no lack of water, at all events, Judith," said my mother. "Hark! how the rain is beating on the windows! But pray don't exercise your imagination any more. You make one nervous. If any thing were wrong we should soon know it. Ill news travels apace."

There came a loud ring at the hall door, which startled us all. It proved to be the groom, who appeared at the door of the dining-room, dripping wet, with a note in his hand. It contained a few lines in pencil addressed by my grandfather to me, to the effect that Donald and grandfather were together, and quite safe and well; but that there had been an accident, and their medical assistance was needed. They might not return all night. Donald added a word or two: "Pray go to rest, darling, and make your mother and Mrs. Abram do the same."

I went into the kitchen to cross-question the groom. He had been particularly cautioned, he said, not to frighten Mrs. Furness. But he was to tell me that a gentleman had been found in Diggleton Wood robbed, and badly hurt, and been carried into the Royal Oak inn, which was the nearest house, and the doctor and Mr. Ayrlie were attending him. It was one of them London gentlemen who had been staying at Market Diggleton. He was an awfully rich

gentleman, they did say, and all sorts of tales were going about as to how much money he had been robbed of. The thief hadn't been caught yet. But the police were after him. The groom was greatly excited, and would have held forth all night if I would have remained to listen to him. But I left him to regale the ears of the other servants with the unwonted feast of news he had brought home with him, and returned to urge my mother to go to bed.

"I knew it!" exclaimed Judith, solemnly. "Didn't I say there had been some accident? I've been feeling it in my bones all the evening!"

I told mother the groom's story with as much steadiness and composure as I could muster, and begged her to go quietly to bed.

It was more difficult to persuade Judith to do so. But at length she consented. The man was to sit up for his master. All the household was in a state of nervous excitement; but fortunately I could depend on Eliza to be steady and quiet with my mother, and not to weary her with wordy conjectures, and the repetition of all the rumors which seemed to be springing up magically in the very midst of our quiet household. For, by dint of talking the matter over among themselves, the servants had arrived at an extraordinary degree of circumstantiality in the narrative before the house was hushed for the night.

By an early hour next morning the news had spread all over Horsingham. Retired as were our house and our ways of life, fifty different rumors penetrated to us. It seemed as if they were carried in the air. I had passed a sleepless night, and arose soon after it was light to watch for grandfather's return. Mother was still sleeping, when at length I heard the sound of wheels, and ran out trembling and eager.

Grandfather was alone. But a glance at his face showed me that there was nothing to fear for Donald. He waved his hand encouragingly as soon as he saw me. He was in a vehicle which I recognized as belonging to the Royal Oak, and was driven by Dodd's hostler.

What follows was narrated to me by my grandfather, and I give it as nearly as possible in his own words.

"I drove," he said, "to the inn at Market Diggleton. It was growing dusk when I reached it, and was darker than usual at that hour, by reason of the sky being overcast with clouds. On demanding to speak with 'Mr. Smith,' I was told he was out. I was prepared to be told so, and said to the waiter that I knew Mr. Smith denied himself to most people, but that my business was urgent, and I positively must see him. I would take no refusal. The man knew me, and assured me that he was not deceiving me. 'Mr. Smith went to W—— this morning, Sir,' he said. 'He may be back to-night, or he may not. I can't say. If you don't believe me, you can

go and look in his rooms.' He threw open the door, first of a sitting-room, and then of a bedroom, and I saw that they were empty. I asked, if Mr. Smith came back that night, at what hour he would do so, and was told at about eight. A coach that plied between W—— and Horsingham would bring him to within a mile of Market Diggleton, and he would then walk to the inn.

"I was now rather at a loss what to do. After a little deliberation I resolved to go to Dodd's house, and endeavor to speak with him. He was within, and he and his good wife gave me a hearty welcome. He had been expecting to see Mr. Ayrle, he said. Mr. Ayrle had promised to look in at the Royal Oak that afternoon, as he would be visiting some poor patients, farm laborers, not far from Diggleton's End. But he had not yet appeared. Dodd was a good deal perplexed in his mind, and by degrees, during the frequent absences of his wife, who was busy with her household affairs, he confided to me the cause of his perplexity. He had certain suspicions regarding Mr. Smith. Mr. Ayrle had laughed at him at first, but it appeared that the strength of his (Dodd's) persuasion had somewhat availed at last. For Mr. Ayrle, after warning him over and over again to be cautious, had at length consented to come and talk the matter over, and try to devise some means of getting at the truth. 'You see, Sir,' said Dodd, 'this Mr. Smith fought uncommon shy of Horsingham folks; would see none of 'em if he could help it. That didn't look like being on the square. But I had had a glimpse of him once or twice by chance. And I had heard his voice one day in the inn-yard at Market Diggleton, and I'd dodged him here and there, and watched him after I began to have my suspicions, and the notion I had in my head grew stronger and stronger.' But it presently appeared that Dodd's interests in the matter conflicted with his search for truth, for he confessed to me that he wanted to sell his fields to the 'Company,' and that Mr. Smith's favor or opposition would be all-important to him in that negotiation. 'Sometimes I'm tempted to think I must be cracked to harbor such a suspicion. But then at other times it takes hold upon me so strong—specially if I'm lying awake o' nights—that I feel as if I must rise up then and there and take steps in the matter.'"

"But to what," said I, interrupting my grandfather, "did Dodd's suspicions point?"

"You will hear, Anne," he answered, gravely, and then resumed: "Greatly to Dodd's surprise, I told him that I believed I held in my hands a clew which might lead to the discovery of the truth, but that success depended on our acting with caution; and that, above all, no hint of danger must be allowed to reach the ears of Mr. Smith. I declined to tell Dodd any particulars of my plan for the present; and he declared he was willing to trust to my wisdom in the matter. By this time it was past

eight o'clock. The rain had come on, and the night was very dark. I had resolved to return to the inn at Market Diggleton before going home, being unwilling to lose the chance of seeing the man I was in search of that night. It was, of course, possible—indeed, likely—that he would remain at W—— all night; but, as I have said, I would not lose a chance. Alice tried to persuade me to let their horse be put to a covered cart they use for marketing, and to drive to Market Diggleton in that, as she declared I should be wet to the skin in my own little open chaise. But I refused, being unwilling to lose more time. I had plenty of wraps, and Dodd lent me a great mackintosh cape; and, after all, I'm not reduced to being afraid of a shower of rain. So I declared myself ready to start. But all the discussion had taken up time. It had taken some time, too, although not a great deal, to get the groom to move from the comfortable kitchen of the Royal Oak, where he was being entertained with unlimited hospitality. Altogether it must have been hard upon nine o'clock before the chaise was ready. My servant had scarcely gathered the reins in his hand when a man came running breathless into the stable-yard, all wet and splashed with the mire of the road. Assistance was needed at once! A man was lying badly hurt in Diggleton Wood. Maybe he was murdered. They must send a mattress and some men to help carry him. And some one with a lantern. Mr. Ayrle, the doctor, was there, and said they'd best carry him to the Royal Oak, as 'twas the nearest house. Haste, haste!

"Alice behaved very well. She was quick and quiet, and peremptorily hushed down her two foolish serving-women, who began to cry and clap their hands hysterically. In almost as short a time as it takes to tell it you quite a procession started from the Royal Oak, carrying a mattress and blankets to sling it by, and with Dodd himself at their head bearing a big stable lantern. I believe I was the only man left about the place. But my old legs could not keep pace with the speed the others were making. 'At least,' said I to Alice, who, now that the necessity for action was over, was looking very faint and scared—'at least this poor fellow will be well looked after, whoever he is. Whatever could be done for him Donald would be sure to do.' Then we waited, with what outward composure we might. It was really a short time, although it seemed long enough to us, before the party returned, bearing on the mattress a form covered up and sheltered from the rain as far as was practicable. Dodd still led the way with the lantern, and beside the bearers of the mattress walked Donald. Dodd had already told him of my presence at the Royal Oak, and he greeted me with outstretched hand, saying in a low voice, 'I'm afraid this is a bad business.' 'Is he dead?' I asked. Donald shook his head slightly. Do you guess, Anne, whose that maimed figure was that was

laid on a bed under Dodd's roof, with Donald ministering to him and tending him? I see the answer in your white face. Our first business—Donald's and mine—was to ascertain the extent of the injuries he had received. I had the room cleared of all save Dodd, who assisted us, and we proceeded to make our examination. He had been robbed. The pockets of an overcoat he wore were rifled. His watch was gone, but the broken chain was still attached to his waistcoat. The robber must have done his work in fear of interruption and detection, for every thing bore marks of extreme haste. The injured man lay perfectly insensible under our hands. He had been 'garroted,' as the word is; rendered insensible by a drug, and then brutally beaten. He had received a frightful blow on the back of the head, a blow evidently given by a heavy, blunt instrument. I spare you all the painful details. In removing his clothes, I found a little pocket-book, or portfolio, in an inner pocket. Your description immediately came into my mind. I opened the pocket-book and found there—your letter. The little leather case contained nothing else. I sent Dodd out of the room to ask for something of which we had need, and the moment he was gone, I took from my note-book, in which it had lain, unknown to any one, for many a day, a torn greasy scrap of paper. I smoothed the letter out, and laid my torn scrap to it. As I had expected, they fitted nearly perfectly. 'Look here, Donald,' said I. 'Do you recognize this?' It was the scrap of oily paper on which the thief who had robbed him in that very house on the night we have all such deep cause to remember had wiped his fingers. Donald knew it at once, and looked at me in speechless amazement. 'Then,' said he at length, almost in a whisper, 'Dodd was right! And the wretched man before us is no other than the disguised Methodist parson! He *must* have been then flying from detection, and doubtless made one of the horde of blackguards of all sorts and classes which the races annually cause to swarm into Horsingham. But who could have conceived—who could have dreamed, of finding such a one in the position of this Smith?

"That is not his only *alias*, Donald,' I said. 'There is yet another name he is known by in Horsingham; whether *that* be his own or not, God knows! He was once called here—Gervase Lacer.'

"I then related to him, as briefly and clearly as I could, the story of your meeting with him; and told him that the circumstances of his having in his possession a letter written by you first put me on the right track for discovering his identity with the itinerant preacher. I had picked up and carefully preserved the torn scrap of your letter—I hardly knew why myself; certainly not foreseeing what it was to lead to—and had said no word about it to any one. I would you could have seen our dear Donald, child, by that bedside! After the

first moment he put aside every thing but the plain duty which lay before him. There was no room for wrath or vengeance in his heart at that time. The man was lying maimed and injured before him, dependent on Donald's skill and care for life itself, and he nobly fulfilled the noble duties of his calling. I felt proud and thankful to know that my dear child's child was to be the wife of such a man!"

"God bless him!" I sobbed out. I was blinded by tears.

Grandfather then told me that, after a hurried consultation between them, he and Donald had decided to say nothing for the present to Dodd of their discovery. The greatest confusion reigned in the house. Servants were running hither and thither, carrying the wildest reports to and fro. All Alice's energy and sense barely sufficed to keep a semblance of order. Up to a very late hour groups of people kept coming into the bar, and the excitement caused a great consumption of liquor. Presently Mr. —, the London engineer who had been staying at Market Diggleton on behalf of the "Company," arrived. He was greatly shocked at the dreadful occurrence, but did not waste many words. His chief anxiety was to discover the ruffian who had committed the crime. He was very energetic, and imposed something like energy even into the phlegmatic rural constable, for whom Alice had long ago expressed so profound a contempt. No money was to be spared, said Mr. —, and no trouble.

"Has suspicion fallen upon any one?" I asked.

"I don't know, child. I heard some vague rumor. I could not concern myself with that. Donald and I had hands and head fully occupied with our wretched patient."

"Is there—is there danger, grandfather? Danger to life?"

"Anne, there is danger—great danger. The unfortunate wretch has been badly hurt. He was still insensible when I came away. He may perhaps never recover consciousness."

"Oh, it is terrible!"

"It is terrible; but—ought we to wish to prolong such a life?"

"Oh, but time—! Time to repent, to do better! Think of being hurled at one blow into the awful gulf of the hereafter!"

I was terribly agitated, and grandfather soothed me, and was tenderly patient with me as he had been in my childish days. After a while I grew calmer, and could be considerate for the dear old man who was so unselfishly considerate for others. I made him go and lie down. He was very weary. As for myself, although I had passed a sleepless night, I was utterly unable to rest. Grandfather had insisted, before going to his own room, that I should retire to mine. I consented, chiefly to avoid the pain of being questioned. The house was beginning to be astir, and I dreaded to meet Judith, and yet more to have to reply

to my mother's inquiries. I had not fortitude enough to bear them as yet; for, above all things, it was necessary that mother should continue to believe that the victim of this crime was a mere stranger to us. I think that an abrupt communication of the truth might have killed her. She could never, to the end of her life, bear even a passing allusion to the old days at Water-Eardley, and those who had been associated with those days, without the keenest pain of mind.

I lay weeping and trembling on my bed. Old memories, which had seemed to be obliterated from my brain, came thronging back to me. The ghosts of departed days came and looked at me with eyes full of almost unendurable pathos. I felt an anguish of compassion for the man who lay upon his bed of pain a detected criminal—the man who had once held my hand and asked me to be his wife, and whom I, in my girlish folly and ignorance, playing with a mighty passion as a child might play with fire, had once fancied that I loved!

It was bright, broad day, and the sun was shining on the world, and the leaves and grass still sparkled with the tremulous diamonds of last night's rain, when Donald came home.

I heard him enter, and stole down to meet him. He was just entering the study when I came along the passage, and whispered his name. He turned and took my hand, and led me into the room. I could not speak, but I looked at him, and I felt my lips quivering beyond all power of mine to control.

"Darling!" he said, very solemnly, "my own dear love, it is all over. He is dead."

Then he opened his arms, and let me weep my heavy heart out on his breast.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE public excitement in Horsingham was intense. The crime itself—in its special circumstances—was an unprecedented one in our neighborhood. Horsingham had not had the honor of contributing so enthralling an item of news to the daily press for many a long year, if, indeed, it ever had done so. But in our own neighborhood one of the greatest sources of interest, and which seemed to add a hideous relish to the eagerness (always hideous enough to me) with which all particulars of the crime were sought out and discussed, was the fact that the murdered man had been the rich "City gentleman" who was so influential in the "Company" that was to make so many people's fortunes in Horsingham.

Heaven forgive me if I wrong them, but I used to think at the time that the knots of gossiping idlers who at all times and seasons, and in all manner of places, were to be found discussing the dreadful event, would fain have had yet more horrors to gloat over; and that if a financial "smash," as they termed it—in other words, the ruin of many families—could have

been the result of the victim's death, their excitement would have been more pleasurable than painful. But no such thing happened, at least so far as Horsingham folks ever knew. I had to school myself to hear the event discussed in all sorts of tones by all sorts of people. Two brave, faithful men were ready and willing to screen me from the pain such discussions caused me, but they could not do so altogether. Something—much—I had to bear, which neither Donald nor grandfather could spare me. Thank Heaven, my mother was spared entirely. It was not so difficult a task as it seemed at first to shut out from her the rumors with which the town was ringing. Newspapers she never read. Our two old servants were faithful and discreet, and few strangers were ever admitted into mother's presence. Poor Judith had a dim idea—born of the true affection which made her observant of us all—that the murder had been a severer trial to me, had affected me more powerfully than it had affected others. She watched me pityingly, would timidly stroke my hair or press my hand when she thought herself unobserved, and made efforts to turn aside the conversation whenever it approached that topic in my presence. That her efforts were generally unintelligible to third persons, and that they consequently had no effect save to cause various persons to enter into elaborate recapitulations of the most harrowing details, under the impression that she had not understood their previous statements—all this was not her fault. And I was none the less grateful for the simple attachment which prompted her attempts.

Due and well-directed inquiries elicited information which put the police on the track of the robber who had given so tragic a fame to the peaceful thickets of Diggleton Wood. A man had been several times to the inn where Mr. Smith was staying to ask for him—a shabby, drunken, evil-looking fellow. On two occasions he had seen Mr. Smith and spoken with him, and one of the waiters had seen him counting money in his hand as he went away. Mr. Smith had given orders that the man was to be admitted whenever he came. This order had excited a good deal of surprise among the servants of the inn at the time, more especially as Mr. Smith seemed to dislike the fellow, and once a loud altercation had taken place between them. When the servants entered the room Mr. Smith had appeared to be soothing his strange visitor, who looked angry and sullen. The latter had not been seen in the neighborhood since the murder.

He was traced, by the description given of him by the inn servants, to W——, where he had again sought Mr. Smith on the very day that the crime was committed. It was supposed that he had then gained information as to the way by which his unfortunate victim would return to Market Diggleton, and had waylaid him with intent to rob him. Murder had probably not been his object at all. Many persons came forward to testify that they had seen this man wan-

dering about the neighborhood. One person was able to say who he was. This witness was William Hodgekinson, who declared that the drunken fellow who had haunted the Market Diggleton inn could, from the description, be no other than Flower, our former groom, who (as may be remembered) had applied to Farmer Hodgekinson to get him a situation, and had been repulsed. Yet it seemed at first sight incredible that such a small, poor creature as Flower was, weakened, too, by disease and intemperance, should have been able to overpower a vigorous man like the supposed Mr. Smith. But there was irrefragable evidence to prove that Smith had been stupefied by means of chloroform.

There were no means of tracing any of the stolen property. The watch had been found the next morning not far from the scene of the crime. The robber had probably thrown it away, fearing, on second thoughts, that it might lead to his detection. What amount of ready cash the murdered man had about him was never known. He was known to carry considerable sums on his person, and was rather ostentatious in the display of his money.

From the first moment the rumor reached me I had a firm conviction that Flower was the guilty man; and my conviction was shared by my grandfather. Donald hesitated to come so absolutely to the same conclusion.

"Ah!" said my grandfather, "that is because you don't know the villain as well as Anne and I know him."

"A man may be a villain, and yet stop short of murder."

"I tell you there was no stopping short for such as he. I remember so well saying to poor George when he first engaged this ill-omened wretch, 'What! he comes to you furnished with a diploma from the high school of perdition!' Alas! I spoke more truly than I knew."

However it be, the truth has not yet been revealed, and in all likelihood never will be. Flower was never seen in our neighborhood more. A warrant was taken out against him, and search was made, but he was never captured. Some said he had escaped to America. Others surmised that he had drowned himself. (This latter story arose simply from the fact that about that time the body of a man was found in the Thames, and remained for some time unclaimed and unrecognized.) One favorite legend was that he had got away to the Continent, and was so highly valued there for his knowledge of race-horses that a number of powerful and illustrious personages had combined, although thoroughly cognizant of the crime he had committed, to shield him from the pursuit of the English law in order to profit by his rare skill and experience.

I know that for many and many a year the thought that the guilty, undetected wretch who did the brutal deed might be wandering about the world, might be in the same country, in the

same town, with myself—that I might rest my gaze upon him, and suspect nothing of the horrible weight of crime that lay upon his soul—haunted me like a hideous crime. I would wake in the night-season cold and shuddering with the horror of that thought, which seemed to have pierced my sleep like a sword. I touch as slightly as I can upon all that. Even now the remembrance of it chills and oppresses me.

I believe that, except my grandfather, Donald, and myself, no one suspected the identity of "Mr. Smith" with Gerase Lacer. If there were in Horsingham another who guessed or knew it, it may have been Matthew Kitchen. But this is a mere surmise of mine. Matthew kept his own counsel; and if he knew the secret the world was never the wiser.

In the first moments of the shock that had come upon us, I remember very well that I had a special dread of my uncle's family. What the Cudberrys would say and do I dared not contemplate, and I feared I should never be able to nerve myself sufficiently to face their pitiless comments and their insatiable curiosity. But it chanced that they displayed comparatively little interest in the topic with which the whole neighborhood was ringing, and that for two reasons: the first was that their attention was naturally much engrossed by Clementina's marriage, now close at hand; and the second was an unexpected event, which I must chronicle in due course.

I had been especially invited to the wedding at Woolling, and had given a half promise to be present. But I now felt that such an effort was impossible to me, and Donald and my grandfather agreed in saying that it was out of the question. To my mother little explanation of my change of plan was needed. She found it quite natural that I should be unwilling to enter a scene of boisterous merriment just then; although she little knew—thank Heaven—what deeply painful reason I had to shrink from such a gathering. But to the Cudberrys it was very difficult to make an acceptable excuse. At last my grandfather cut matters short by saying that, as my doctor, he did not mean to allow me to risk any excitement. I had been ailing and nervous of late, he declared, and might possibly spoil the mirth of the party and mar the occasion by fainting, or having to go to bed with violent headaches, or some equally disagreeable proceeding. This threat availed.

"Lord bless 'ee, my love!" said Aunt Cudberry, "don't you come here to be fainting, or any thing of that sort. For with all I have to do, and Mrs. Hodgekinson's stern eye upon the pastry—to say nothing of my natural feelings for Clementina, poor thing!—I could not endure one grain more worry. It would turn the scale, and break the camel's back, love, and so I tell you."

Poor Clemmy and her bridegroom were really disappointed, and I was sorry to vex them. So sorry was I that I promised to go to Wool-

ling the evening before the wedding to see the trusso, as Uncle Cudberry called his daughter's outfit, to behold the glories of the breakfast-table, laid out ready to receive the good things which cost Aunt Cudberry such toil of body and anxiety of mind, to say a kind word of good wishes to the bridal pair, and to present a little wedding gift from each member of the household at Mortlands. They were all very simple presents except Donald's, who gave a really handsome piece of plate. But I must do Clemmy the justice to say that she showed no peculiar delight in or preference for the costliest gift. She was genuinely touched and gratified at having been remembered by each one of us separately; and she sent a special message of thanks to Mrs. Abram for her offering of several pairs of knitted muffatees of fleecy wool. These articles were oppressive to look upon in the sultry summer weather; but then, as Judith observed, the winter *would* certainly come round again, and it was well to be prepared.

I had made it an express condition of my visit that no stranger should be present—not even Mrs. Hodgekinson; no one but the Cudberry family, and, of course, William Hodgekinson, who was so soon to become my cousin. Grandfather and Donald were to come and fetch me early in the evening.

The day passed off very well. Henrietta was the only sour drop amidst the general sweetness. But no one much minded her. She did not dare to be very offensive in words when her father was present, so she was reduced to exhibiting her disdain of her future brother-in-law by expressive sniffs and shrugs, and wide stares of affected amazement whenever he lapsed into any very broad rusticity in his talk. To me she was reserved and lofty, which mood suited me very well, as it dispensed me from the necessity of conversing much with her. So that altogether the day passed off very well, as I have said.

Grandfather and Donald arrived about half past five o'clock. Aunt and Uncle Cudberry received them more than graciously. Henny thawed a little on their coming, and performed a waltz with variations on the piano-forte before tea, which reduced us all to absolute speechlessness for full five minutes after it was finished. But I suppose that was no uncommon effect of Henny's performances, and, for aught I know, may have been the very one she intended to produce; for she appeared quite satisfied, and took her seat at the tea-table in very tolerable good humor.

We had got about half-way through the meal, when wheels were heard approaching the house. Then the gate creaked, and footsteps crushed the gravel of the garden path.

"Who on earth can this be?" cried Aunt Cudberry, with one of her indescribable grimaces and a doleful tone of voice.

As this was a question no one of us could answer, we went on with our tea, and said nothing. Presently there was a strange sound

of hustling and scuffling in the hall, and a suppressed voice, which yet was distinctly audible to us, and appeared to proceed from immediately outside the sitting-room door, was heard to say, "Do as I tell you. Say it, you booby!"

Upon this the door was thrown violently open, and Daniel of the ruddy locks, entering with a plunge, as though he had been pushed from behind, announced, in a loud tone of voice, "Mr. and Mrs. Whiffles!"

There was a sudden and unnatural silence among us, and, as it were, a dead pause of expectation, until there appeared in the doorway Mr. Whiffles with Tilly Cudberry on his arm, when Aunt Cudberry immediately uttered an extraordinary sound, more like a squeak than a scream, and Uncle Cudberry sprang from his chair all with one jerk, like a Jack-in-the-box, and stood staring at them speechlessly.

Never shall I forget the apparition of the strangely assorted couple that now advanced into the centre of the room.

Tilly was dressed in bright lilac silk, with a white bonnet, and white gloves much too long for her. She had replaced her favorite hollyhocks by a mass of white flowers—chiefly orange blossoms—which looked as though they had been collected from several milliners' shops, and not bought all at once, being heterogeneous in style and make. Her eyes were very bright and very wide open. Her face was of a fiery red hue, by no means mitigated by the coating of powder she had spread over it with a bold and unsparing hand. Her whole aspect breathed a mixture of energy, triumph, and defiance.

Mr. Whiffles, on the other hand, was subdued, not to say abject, in appearance. His attire was new, and comprised, I should think, nearly every color of the rainbow. He wore a pair of the light yellow gloves which I remembered as a specialty of his toilet, but on this occasion the light yellow gloves were clean. His breastpin I am afraid to describe. Had the stones in it been real, I should suppose they would have been worth several thousand pounds. He carried a shining hat in one hand and a large white handkerchief in the other, and he used the handkerchief at frequent intervals in the manner of a mop all over his face. Tilly's hand rested on his arm, but, in truth, it seemed rather that she was supporting him—or, at all events, regulating his movements—for she drew him forward with an obvious tug into a commanding position, whence she could survey us all, and looking round, with elation in her eye, exclaimed in a sonorous voice, "*Well*, ma and pa, I am now Matilda Whiffles!"

Aunt Cudberry repeated the squeak, but it now came muffled from behind her handkerchief. No one else moved an eyelash. To a disinterested observer, had any such been present, we must all have presented the appearance of being spell-bound.

"I am, in fact," pursued Tilly, with fresh emphasis, "*Mrs.* Whiffles! And this"—presenting him by pushing him slightly forward

and then drawing him toward her again—"is *Mr.* Whiffles. I do hope, pa and ma, that the Cudberrys will make up their minds to receive him properly and in a becoming spirit. In point of position the Cudberrys have nothing to say; their tongues are tied on that score by the approaching alliance of a Cudberry of Wool-ling—*although* but the third daughter—with Mrs. Hodgekinson's son! But as far as that goes, pa and ma, I have long said that we must move with the times; and I feel quite friendly myself, and so does Mr. Whiffles, toward all the Cudberrys."

Mr. Whiffles's head shook violently from side to side, but in some half-audible murmurings he appeared to confirm his wife's statement. Still none of the rest of the party appeared able to utter a word. Henrietta had turned livid—I suppose from indignation. Clemmy and young Hodgekinson had squeezed themselves close together at one side of the table, and looked as frightened as a couple of school-children who witness the spectacle of a comrade in disgrace, and are conscious that fortune rather than merit has saved themselves from the like. Aunt Cudberry's face was completely muffled in her handkerchief, and her husband remained staring at his daughter Tilly with an utterly wooden and expressionless countenance.

"We were married *this* morning," pursued the bride, continuing to affront the discouraging silence of her parents with a dauntless energy which really was almost heroic, "at the Church of St. James and St. John, by the Reverend Morgan Jones. Mrs. Nixon was present, and Mr. Nixon gave away the bride. We start this evening by the coach for a short tour of one week, after which we return to take possession of our own house in the High Street, Horsingham. I am aware, pa and ma, that you may consider yourselves to have some cause of complaint against me for not having informed you of my engagement, and asked your consent. But the truth is, it was sudden; extremely sudden"—Mr. Whiffles here gave the queerest little gasping cough, and mopped his face violently—"and, besides, I thought it very likely that obstacles might be raised and opposition attempted by the Cudberrys. But *really* if I had depended on the Cudberrys, instead of acting a little for myself, I might never have got married at all! Mr. Whiffles's business prospects are very good; his connection is increasing, and he is patronized by the first people in the county. The house is nicely furnished and cheerful, with windows looking both ways, up *and* down the High Street. There is a private entrance; and as to a slight smell of stables, that can scarcely be an objection to a Cudberry of Wool-ling, whose bedroom has overlooked the farm-yard ever since she can remember! Mr. Whiffles is extremely steady, has obliging manners, and is wishful to conciliate. As to differences of birth and education, he is fully aware of them, but feels that a matrimonial connection with the Cudberrys will give him a position

which he is quite certain to do his best to maintain."

To hear Tilly, as it were, appraising her husband like an auctioneer, as unconcernedly as though the poor man were a thousand miles away, and speaking of her father and mother and sisters and brother to their faces as the "Cudberrys," was a truly amazing thing. Her last sentence, however, had been too much for my uncle. He broke his silence with a tremendous oath, which made every one start as though a pistol-shot had been fired among us; and then roared out at the full pitch of his voice, "A matrimonial connection with the Cudberrys! Curse his brazen impudence!"

It seemed as though the spell were snapped all of a sudden; every one began talking at once. Henny scolded, Aunt Cudberry cried, my uncle swore, William Hodgekinson remonstrated and tried to comfort Clemmy, who kept whimpering helplessly and exclaiming, "Oh, don't, please! oh, don't, please!" over and over again, without apparently knowing in the least what she was saying.

Throughout the whole scene I felt the sincerest pity for one actor in it, and that was Mr. Whiffles. His embarrassment and confusion, and his strong sense of cutting but a sorry figure, and his evident inability to hit upon any method of asserting himself and improving his position, really moved my compassion. But when Uncle Cudberry began to swear a gleam came into Mr. Whiffles's eye. He raised his head and looked round him. When Uncle Cudberry continued to let off volley after volley of oaths—which he did in the oddest way, as though they dropped from his mouth without his will or foreknowledge, like the toads and snakes from the lips of the girl in the fairy-tale—Mr. Whiffles shook off his wife's arm, and advanced with an air of resolution to his father-in-law. The change in his demeanor was so marked that it arrested uncle's attention in the full torrent of his wrath. There was a pause. Mr. Whiffles cleared his throat, twitched his head, pulled up his shirt collar, and said, in a mild, mournful voice, singularly at variance with the words he uttered: "Now look here, Mr. Cudberry of Woolling, this is all dam nonsense! It is, upon my soul, you know. What's the use of your flaring up like this, Mr. Cudberry? I didn't want to come here at all. I'd a dam sight rather not, in point of fact; but Miss Cud—I mean my wife—she would come, you know. My plan would have been to have wrote a few lines to the family announcing the—event—announcing the event, and leaving it free to the family to come and see us *or* to leave it alone, according as it suited their book, if I may be allowed to make use of such an expression. But now Miss Cud—I mean Mrs. Whiffles—has had her own way, and I hope she likes it. I have no wish to intrude 'ere or helsewhere, Mr. Cudberry of Woolling. I meet conciliation *with* conciliation, but I won't stand being bullied;

'specially when it ain't my fault. I didn't want to marry Miss Cud—at least, of course, I don't mean that; but what I've got to say is, that I didn't begin it."

"*Circumstances*," put in Tilly, with intense emphasis, and no whit abashed by her bridegroom's singular defense of himself—"circumstances threw us together, in the first place."

"Yes," pursued Mr. Whiffles, "circumstances over which I'd no control. Your daughter's old enough to know her own mind. And though your family may be as *genteel* as Queen Victory's, still family ain't every think. I can keep your daughter like a lady, and I intend to do it. And the long and the short of it is, that your flaring up in this way, Mr. Cudberry of Woolling, is—dam nonsense. 'Pon my soul, it is!"

This speech appeared somewhat to raise Mr. Whiffles in Uncle Cudberry's opinion. He ceased to growl and mutter, and, turning away, walked once or twice up and down the room. Donald and my grandfather, after a whispered word or two with me, drew uncle aside, and began talking to him in a low voice. Meanwhile I crossed the room to Tilly, who was standing quite isolated, and looking very flushed and flustered in her bridal finery, and gave her my hand. You and I have no quarrel, at all events, Tilly," said I.

"Miss Furness," exclaimed Mr. Whiffles, with enthusiasm, "I am grateful to you for your kindness to Mrs. W. You are a lady from the crown of your head to the sole of your foot, Miss Furness; and I never, in the whole course of my existence, had the 'appiness to see you looking so remarkably and uncommonly well as you are looking at this moment!"

Grandfather now came up, and began talking gently and gravely to Tilly. He pointed out to her that her parents were naturally aggrieved and hurt at the manner of her marriage. "We won't say any thing about the choice you have made, because that is a point on which I think no one has a right to interfere with you at your age, and because I think and hope that your marriage may turn out to be a satisfactory one when this little breeze has blown over. But your father and mother have a right to expect some soft word from you, some expression of sorrow at having offended them. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Whiffles?"

Mr. Whiffles was all humility to my grandfather, and was ready to agree to any thing he might say. Between them, they persuaded Tilly to sue for her father's forgiveness; which she did with a good deal of rigidity, and a good many allusions to the exemplary manner in which she was sacrificing her own feelings, and to the pattern of filial piety she was setting in condescending to ask pardon at all.

By degrees, Mr. Cudberry was, not softened—that is certainly not the right word—but brought to say that what couldn't be cured must

be endured, and that he hoped Tilly wouldn't live to repent having made a fool of herself. To Mr. Whiffles he merely said, with a portentous look, "I'm glad to find you've some pluck about you. *You'll want it.*"

Mrs. Cudberry dried her eyes, and kissed Tilly, and took hold of Mr. Whiffles's yellow glove, and then dropped it as if it had burned her.

"So you've been and married Miss Cudberry, have you?" said she, tearfully. "Ah dear! ah dear! Poor thing!"

It must be owned that poor Mr. Whiffles's bridal congratulations were not altogether exhilarating.

Clementina and her betrothed made friends with their new brother-in-law as far as they could; but Mr. Whiffles was ill at ease, and was evidently relieved when his wife declared that it was time to be going, or they should lose the coach. There was only one member of the party who remained utterly implacable. With Henrietta there were no terms to be made. She even, for the first time in her life, openly resisted her father's authority when he desired her to shake hands with her sister and wish her good-by.

"No, pa," said she; "never! The family *has* been degraded" (with a glance at young Hodgekinson); "but condescend *quite* to wallow in the mire I never will while I have breath!" And if wallowing in the mire meant reconciliation with her sister, she never did.

Before he left the house Mr. Whiffles came and made me a little speech, while his wife was saying farewell to her mother.

"Miss Furness, I am at a loss to express in an adequate manner my sense of your goodness, and of the honor you do me in speaking to one who, like myself, has been destitute of the advantage of ladies' society, and consequently may offend, although involuntarily. Also your revered grandfather, miss"—with a little bow in his direction—"Dr. Hewson, of Mortlands. You need never fear, Miss Furness, nor Dr. Hewson, that I shall intrude or push myself upon you. I am too conscious of the height whereon you stand. If at any time you should like a mount, Miss Furness, my stable is at your service; and if you could ride twelve horses at once, miss, like the famed Ducrow, you should have 'em. I shall ever keep my distance, being aware of my deficiencies. And I wish you, miss, and your honored ma, and your revered grandfather, every 'appiness and prosperity that earth can afford. And I hope you'll allow me to say that never, throughout the course of a rather checkered career, have I beheld you looking so remarkably and astonishingly well as you look at the present moment!"

CHAPTER LVIII.

Is my story told? Nay, not mine. But the story of Anne Furness draws near its close. Anne Ayrle's is a happy story; too bright and

unruffled in its smooth current to tempt either narrator or listener.

I was married in the spring-time, and Mortlands has been my happy home for many years. Dear grandfather lived to a great age, cheerful and benevolent to the last, and died peacefully in his sleep without a pang. My mother was taken before him; but she lived to hold my first-born child in her arms. These two have been the only gaps which death has made in our household.

As I look around me I see few changes in Horsingham. The Arkwrights are contented, although still very poor, as I doubt not they will continue to be to the end of the chapter, unless, indeed, Jane makes a fortune by her pen. Have you ever heard, reader, of a little volume of poems entitled "*Lotus Blossoms*," by J. A.? I fear not. They did not take the world by storm. And yet there is merit in them. Donald says so. Jane is very young still, and may do better. At all events, the exercise of her art (which she pursues with all the earnestness that belongs to her character) makes her very happy. Money could not do more, and might likely do much less, for her. Two of her elder sisters are married, and the boy is doing well.

Alice Dodd and her husband are extremely prosperous. They are childless, but make a point of spoiling all the bairns in the neighborhood, and so stuff them with good things that a visit to the Royal Oak is looked forward to as surpassing even Christmas-day in its opportunities for getting indigestion in all the nurseries I am acquainted with. Dodd made a good deal of money by the sale of his fields to the Slate Quarry Company, which was taken in hand by some moneyed people in London and the neighborhood. It worked successfully for some time, but then the slate suddenly and unexpectedly came to an end, and some people were losers, although not, I believe, to any serious extent. Poor dear grandfather continued to prophesy up to the last that no good could come of it; but he was wrong. He was wrong—that is, if wealth be a good; for Matthew Kitchen made large profits out of the concern. He has become a really rich man. He and his wife are not much liked in the neighborhood; but that troubles them little. They are more pious than ever, and entertain all the traveling preachers of their sect with ostentatious hospitality. Matthew looks very gloomy, and has grown prematurely old. They say his son is a trouble to him; that he is selfish, reckless, and dissolute. And the gossips shake their heads, and say, "Ah! wait till the young fellow comes into that property that has been scraped together so hardly. He will make the money fly like chaff before the wind."

Sir Peter Bunny has long been dead. His wife survives, and lives with Barbara, who is the mistress of a pretty country mansion not far from my old home, and the mother of three blue-eyed, chubby-cheeked little girls, who are

so much like each other, and so near of an age, that I hardly can tell them apart, and all bear a striking resemblance to the Barbara Bunny of my school-days.

Sam Cudberry has never married. He and Henny live as old maid and old bachelor at Woolling, and quarrel and snarl all day long. They have both grown grasping and miserly, and I believe that is the only point on which they agree. I seldom see them; but I am told that Sam often lounges down to Mr. Whiffles's house, and smokes cigars at his brother-in-law's expense, inveighing all the time against the degradation to the family involved in Tilly's marriage. But Mr. Whiffles does not heed this much. He has his wife in wonderful control, and has taught her to think him a very sensible man, with a very firm will of his own. Tilly, of course, is not gentle—that could never be; but she is bustling and thrifty, does not waste her husband's substance, and has accommodated herself to a lower sphere of life than she was used to—as she still boasts—at the Cudberrys'. Her one weak point seems to be her unrequited tenderness and indulgence for her brother Sam. She connives at his appropriating her husband's cigars, drinking her husband's wine, and riding her husband's horses free of cost; for all of which he repays her with insolent ingratitude. But then, as Tilly says, "Sam is *such* a Cudberry! He has the family spirit, if ever any one had!" And in this she takes a pride in some inscrutable way.

Clementina is quite spoiled by overindulgence. Her health has been rather delicate, and her mother-in-law pets her and nurses her

all day long. It seems strange to me to think of, with my remembrance of that awful Mrs. Hodgekinson who was so implacably severe at the Woolling ball, long, long ago.

Yesterday my eldest child came to me with a book in her hand. She had found it hidden away at the bottom of a chest in a garret where all sorts of lumber is piled. Lucy—that is the little girl's name—is an insatiable devourer of books. And what should this turn out to be but my own old, thumbbed, well-beloved copy of "Robinson Crusoe!" I told Donald of it when he came home in the evening, and showed him the dear old volume. We went into the garden after the little ones were in bed, and picked out all the old scenes of our childish plays together. They were little changed. We neither of us desired to make many alterations in the dear Mortlands garden.

"Those were happy times, Anne," said Donald, holding my hand in his, and contemplating the spot where we had discovered the north pole.

"They were happy times, dear; but these are happier."

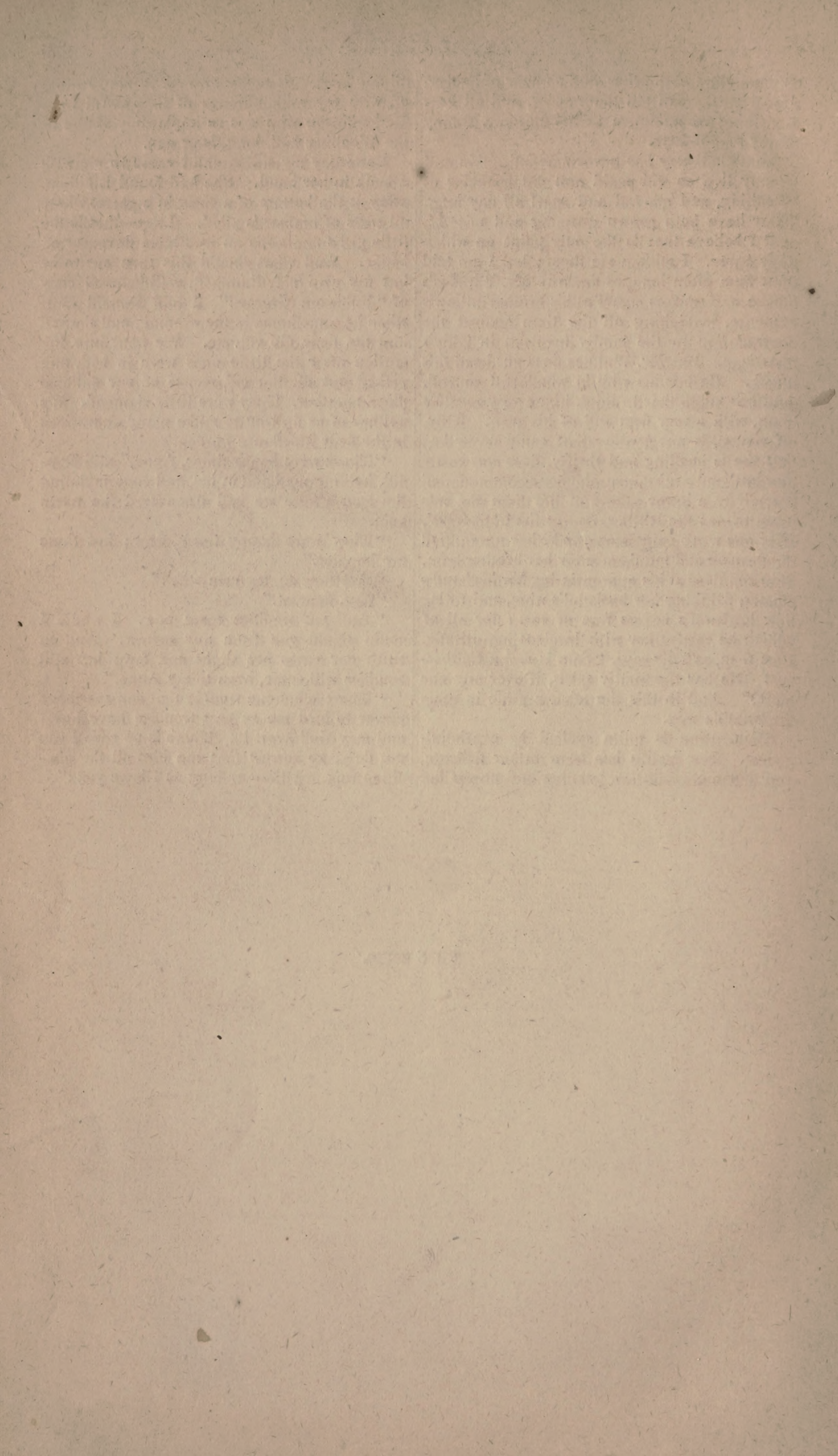
"Are they so, my own wife?"

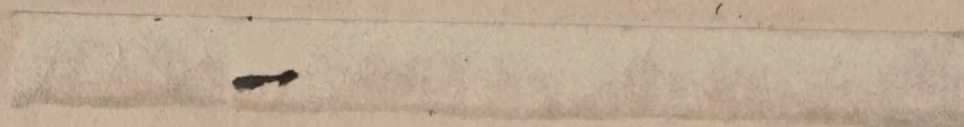
"Yes, dearest."

"And yet troubles come now. I would I could shield you from any sorrow. And in truth our cares are slight and few; but still troubles will come, even to my Anne."

"There is but one trouble that can ever have power to hurt me as past troubles have hurt; and may God avert it! There is no care I can not defy, no sorrow that can blot all the sunshine from my life—so long as I have you!"

THE END.





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